

Bunk

By

W. E. Woodward

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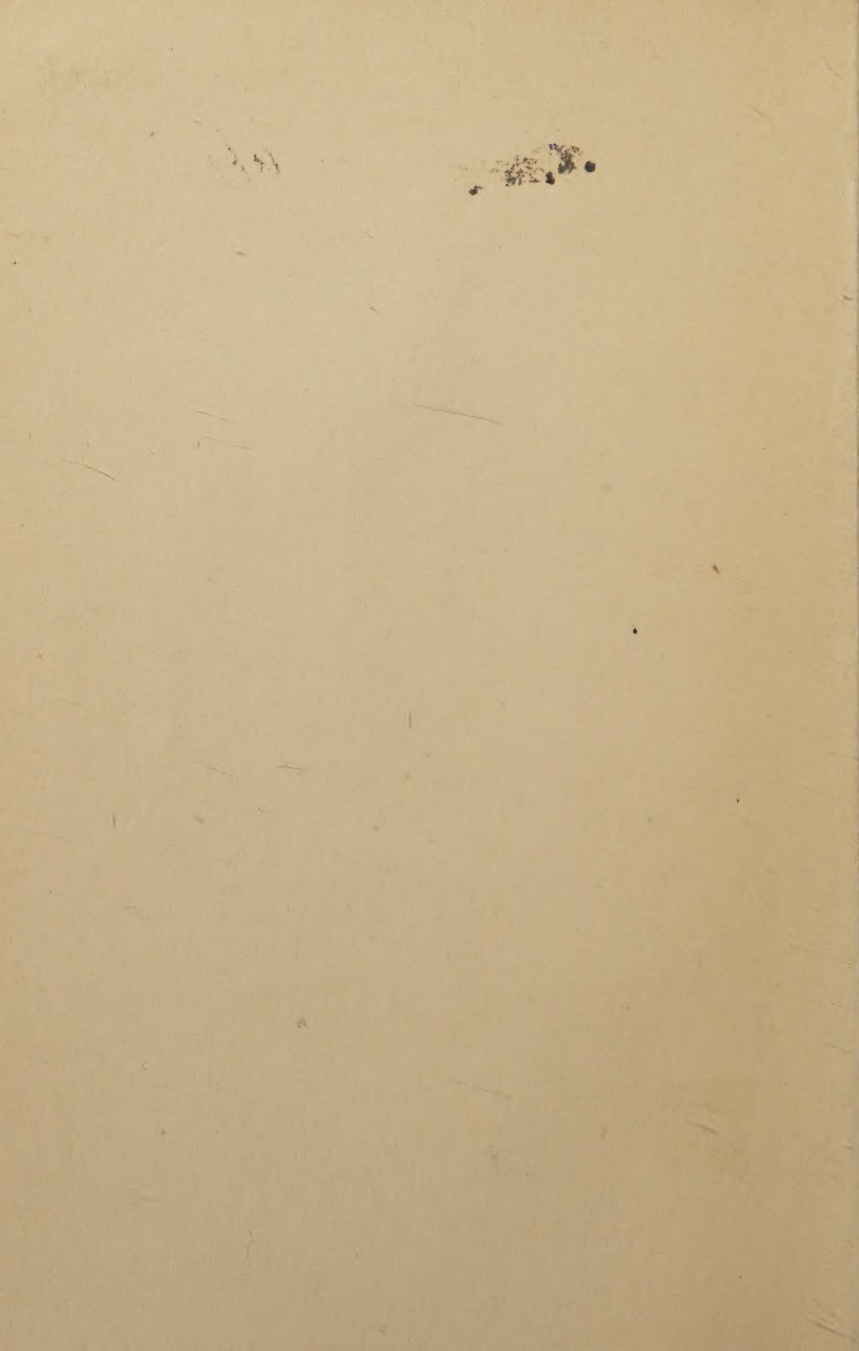
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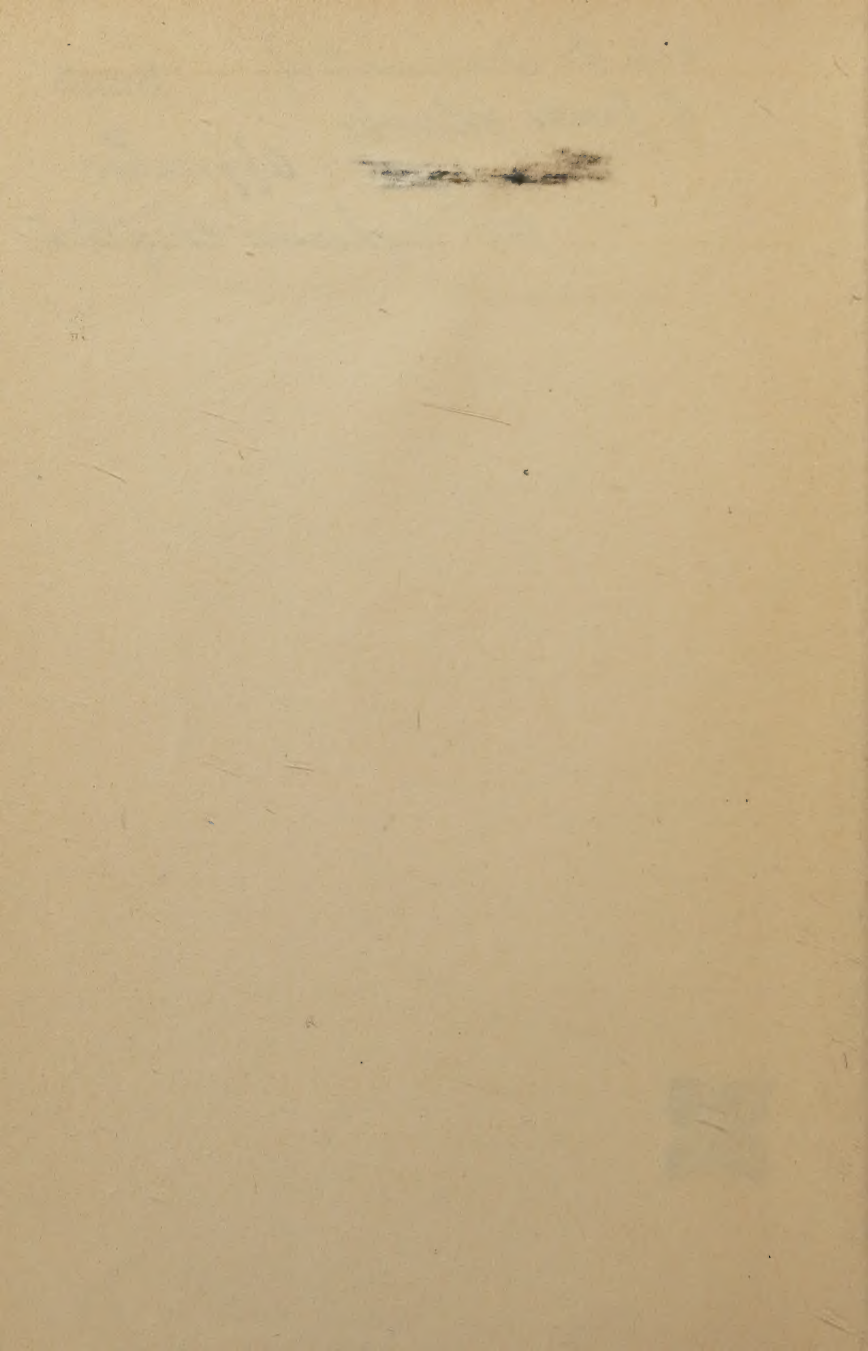
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BY
W. E. WOODWARD



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BUNK

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By W. E. Woodward
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M-X



2061

*I dedicate this book
to the memory of*
REMY DE GOURMONT

*whose ideas, as clear
as crystal and as hard
as steel, arise alive
from his pages, clothed
in beauty and light.*

W. E. W.



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Bunk



BUNK

Chapter One

A Cosmic Evening

I

IT was a Cosmic Evening at the Dumbles'. This is not a term of my own. They called it that. This interesting couple live on East Sixteenth Street, near Stuyvesant Square, in an ancient, flat-faced brick house that has been turned into apartments. On the outside it is drab in color, with a tiled entrance hall, and a glass-panelled door. On the inside it has wide, dim halls, carpeted stairs, and a musty smell. They have taken the second floor because of its large rooms and high ceilings. They need large rooms, for their intermittent social life takes the form of a sort of public forum, where celebrities are invited to come and talk.

At the Dumbles' Cosmic Evenings one meets strange people. Once their celebrated guest for the evening was a cannibal chief—civilized and reformed, of course. In the course of a year there is a procession of placid Hindus; bushy-haired men who have lived twenty years among the Esquimaux; slender, white-faced poets; and others who seem to have within them some struggling and inarticulate message.

I do not know the Dumbles very well. No one does. They appear to exist only to give these affairs, and when one is over they quietly fade away until the time comes to take the lid off the cosmos again. . . .

When I entered the room the cigarette smoke was almost thick enough to cut with a knife. Mrs. Dumble whispered, "we have some interesting people here tonight"—the noise was deafening; all were talking at once—"Mr. M—M—M, and Miss B—B-b."—I couldn't catch the names.

The chaotic turbulence of light and sound eventually shook itself down into a composition of people and furniture, and I noticed that the talking was being done mainly by a strong-chinned, blue-eyed man who sat in a sharp shaft of shadow near a window.

"We are now conducting de-bunking operations on a rather large scale," this man said. "It's a big thing, let me tell you, but so far we've had no competition. We began in a small way about two years ago, and have grown a lot. No job too large and none too small is our motto."

"De-bunking?" asked a lady with an English accent, who sat at my right. "Exactly what is de-bunking? . . . I suppose I ought to know without being told," she added doubtfully.

"Why, de-bunking means simply taking the bunk out of things," the man with the strong chin replied. "You've heard of deflation—of prices, wages, and so on—taking the fictitious values out of merchandise. Well, de-bunking is simply an intellectual deflation. It's the science of reality. That's my business.—I mean to say that I'm a professional de-bunker."

"I don't know what it is yet," the young lady whispered

to me, "and I'm ashamed to ask him. What is bunk, anyway?"

Her condition of mind was most astonishing. Just fancy a grown-up person who has no first-hand knowledge of bunk! My low-voiced explanation was hurried. I hope the young lady understood it. "Why, bunk, my dear young lady," I explained, "is the diminutive, or pet name, for buncombe."

"It's hypocrisy—pretence—then, isn't it?" the young lady whispered back.

"Not altogether," I replied. "It is a kind of illusion. Hypocrisy's a mean word. Illusion, that's it. It's a big thing in life. Millions of people make their living with no other asset."

I turned my attention again to the de-bunking expert. He was describing his methods. "There was a hurry call just before I came here this evening," he was saying, "but I couldn't take the case. One must have a little recreation. A young actor. It's too bad, for such cases are usually fatal. They told me over the phone that this young man was swollen to an enormous size, and was beginning to float around the room like a balloon. He'll probably burst before morning."

"You have a de-bunking establishment, or staff, or plant, or whatever equipment is required in such operations, I suppose?" said a fair-haired and alert-looking gentleman of thirty, whom I recognized as an assistant professor of physical science at a neighboring university.

"Oh, no, only myself," answered the man sitting in the shadow. "I used a plural pronoun just now in describing my activities, but it meant nothing more than the editorial

'we.' Naturally, I employ people to help from time to time, but so far I have no large organization. You see, the field's enormous. To keep the United States thoroughly de-bunked would require the continual services of not less than half a million persons. I'm not trying to create a great industry. I'm merely following a profession."

"How wonderful is science!" murmured a black-eyed lady with brilliant red lips. "Just how do you go about your de-bunking operations?"

"Well, it's difficult to answer that, as the method varies according to the nature of the case. Er—let's see . . . take the case of writers—novelists, poets, and the like. The treatment in these cases is to have their own works read aloud to them day and night, in a high-pitched voice. I employ nurses for that purpose. At the end of each paragraph the nurse stops and asks the patient what he meant by the words she has just read. Cures have often been effected in twenty-four hours by that method.

"It's all jolly interesting. Progress in the art is being made every day. For instance, I am now preparing plans to extract bunk from the air. In the neighborhood of any of our large cities, I mean. . . . Around New York it is quite practicable to take it from the atmosphere in solid chunks—quantity extraction, you know."

While this talk was going on a middle-aged, be-spectacled man whose semi-bald head resembled one of the swelling domes of an orthodox Russian church, was walking angrily up and down the room. All of a sudden he stopped, and interrupted with this outburst: "One moment, my dear sir. It's all very well for you to talk, but—I—er, your plan is the most brazen thing I ever heard of. A public danger, you

and your projects. Besides, it can't be done. Do you know what Rochefoucauld said? '*Celui qui veut entreprendre les grandes choses, doit auparavant éprouver ses forces.*' That means in English whoever wants to undertake big things should first try out his strength. My translation is rather free, but you no doubt get the idea. *Destroy bunk!* You are fighting the most colossal, constructive power in the world. What would the great war have been without bunk? Why, it would have fizzled out in almost no time, and history would have been cheated of her most glorious pages.

"Have you read Schopenhauer? Or Buckle's history? Probably not. If you had read as much as I have, you would know, my dear sir, that mankind needs its bunk and thrives on it. Look what men, under the influence of bunk, have accomplished.

"The gorilla—I am not referring now to *pithecanthropos erectus*, but to *pithecanthropos*, er—er—just ordinary *pithecanthropos*—the gorilla has learned to walk on two feet, and use his hands. But he wears no clothes, he reads no editorials, he goes to no bargain sales. The gorilla has no bunk, and what has he ever done? Nothing. With that spectacle before him a man of any sense would pause and consider. You are playing with dynamite, sir. Dynamite, I say."

My friend, Bobbie Hamilton, who sat near me, leaned over with his hand covering his mouth. "That fellow who lost his temper," he whispered, "is Clapperton, the great editorial writer for the *Evening Standard*."

"Anyhow," Clapperton continued, "the idea is not original with you. If you had as much education as I've

got, you would know that away back in 1817 the distinguished Von Helmuth discovered a practicable method of extracting bunk from people and institutions, but owing to humanitarian reasons it was never put into operation. The result would have been too cruel. Yet, without an atom of pity, you would plunge the world into a despairing and bunkless existence."

"Scientists like myself," the man with the iron jaw said gravely, "cannot be moved by such considerations. We turn our faces to the light, pick up the thread of truth from the loom of life, and let the chips fall where they may. Besides, even if you don't agree with me, Mr. Clapperton, there is no use getting excited about it. If I should work steadily sixteen hours a day for life, I couldn't de-bunk Manhattan Island, to say nothing of the rest of the world. I am touching only a few high spots. You're in no danger."

Clapperton sat uneasily on the edge of a chair and stared at the speaker.

"Some of our cases are most interesting," the de-bunking expert said. "Recently we de-bunked the head of a large financial institution. It was an extraordinary case, and a surgical operation was necessary. This financier was not a large man, but when we operated we removed a solid block of bunk that weighed over a hundred pounds. It was as hard as brass. I don't see how he managed to carry it around."

"Good Lord!" someone said, "did he recover after a major operation like that?"

"Oh, no, he passed away. But the operation was beautiful. I knew it would be fatal, and told his business asso-

ciates that it would end him, but they said go ahead. It was a beautiful operation.

"We are getting ready now to de-bunk one of the metropolitan newspapers. I don't know how it will come out, but judging from the preliminary diagnosis I hardly think there will be much left of the poor thing except the column of death notices and the shipping news."

Upon hearing this Clapperton put his hat on his head, uttered an inarticulate but angry exclamation, and left the house.

There was not as much excitement over his abrupt departure as one might think. The discussions at the Dumbles' often took such a form that people would dash out of the house with cries of rage.

2

The de-bunking specialist took his leave before ten o'clock, an early hour as time is measured at a Cosmic Evening. I intended to stay and hear the comments on him and his ideas, but, finding myself within speaking distance of Mrs. Dumble, I inquired the name of the de-bunking expert.

"Why, Michael Webb," she replied. "I introduced you when you came in."

"I didn't get the name"—I am afraid I showed my excitement—"which Michael Webb?"

"There's only one, so far as I know," she cried, "the traveller, and philosopher. He went round the world, was gone ten or twelve years. He's related in some way to the well-known Webbs of New England."

My goodness! Have you ever happened to come face to face with someone whom you believed to be dead and gone; or living in the South Sea islands; or who had drifted away years ago into the hardware trade?

"Why, that's my character!" I exclaimed to Mrs. Dumble, catching my breath—with my words tumbling over each other. "*My lost character!*"

"Have you lost your character?" Mrs. Dumble asked sweetly. "Has he got it?" . . . To act slightly crazy is quite the thing to do at a Cosmic Evening, and I saw that Mrs. Dumble was beginning to look upon me as an interesting person.

"No, no, Mrs. Dumble," I explained. "A character in my book. You know, I intend to write a book; so I created one of the characters—his name was Michael Webb—and sent him out in the world to get experience, and he never came back."

"Well, he's a celebrated man, now," she said. "I'm astonished that you've never met him before."

"Been away in Mexico for three years," I replied, "and I haven't heard of anything. Do you happen to have his address?"

"He's well-known," she said. "And very interesting, don't you think? . . . You'll find his address in the telephone book. . . . But wait! I have it right here." She took a small morocco-bound address book from a desk, and gave me the street address and telephone number of Michael Webb's office. "Now you've found your character again, you can go ahead with your book, can't you?" she said gently, in the manner of a grown person speaking to a confused child.

"Oh, yes," I replied. "I'll fix up my book right away. Maybe I can catch up with him on the street if I hurry."

3

I remember well the first day I saw Michael Webb. . . . Everybody was dashing off novels. Commuters wrote them while travelling back and forth between Tuckahoe and the Grand Central Station. Plumbers, street car motormen and fourteen-year-old girls were entering literature in droves. So I said to myself one day: *Why not write a novel and be somebody?* Certainly it would be no harm to be somebody, especially as the novel I wanted to write was of the shy and inoffensive kind.

The first thing I did was to buy a book called *Fiction Writing in Twelve Easy Lessons*. . . . I found the lessons too easy. It took a hundred and fifty pages to say: *First*, think up a plot; *Second*, write your book; *Third*, make it interesting. . . . I considered the two dollars I paid for it poorly invested.

Next, I decided to call on a Great Author and ask his advice.

I found him in his library, reading letters. There was something in his manner suggestive of the remoteness, the detachment, of a Chinese sage. Though I've never met one, I've heard that they are supposed to be always remote and detached.

This Great Author does not write about people any more—that was all over years ago—and now his theme is Ideas. He has written brilliantly of Intellectual Orientation and Emotional Æsthetics. At the present time he is

working on his *Social Dynamics*, which is to appear next Spring. It is a study of the everyday problems of the laboring man. "It is my purpose," he explained, "to give these problems their proper evaluation in terms of economic stress."

He motioned me to a chair, and after I had settled down comfortably he inquired as to my experience and antecedents. "Are you a professional author?" he asked, in a kindly tone.

"No, I have no experience in authorship. I thought you might be good enough to give me some suggestions."

He was generous and obliging, but his outlook was discouraging. "It's one of the hardest professions in the world. *Positively*. In fact, it is the only profession where one comes into active competition with dead men. . . . You've heard of my competition with Thackeray? No? Well, we had quite a tussle. At times I thought I had Thackeray down and out, but he kept bobbing up again. These dead men don't know enough to stay dead. Then there's Herman Melville. Dead and buried long ago—and forgotten—and now he has to come to life again."

"I'm not afraid of competition," I said. "My novel's going to be a financial failure but an artistic success, so I will not be in competition with anybody."

"Oh! Well, that's the right spirit," he remarked. "What is your profession or occupation?"

"I'm a Tired Business Man," I said like a shot out of a gun, "and I'm not ashamed of it either." Upon reflecting about the conversation later I feared that I made this statement in a tone tinged with bombastic egotism. "A t.b.m., that's what I am."

"Oh, that's all right," he went along urbanely. "You mean, I presume, that as a Tired Business Man you don't understand literature, but you know what you like?"

I assented to this supposition.

"Tired Business Men do write novels now and then—a few have done it," he mused, "but as a rule, they're rather stiff, stodgy productions. Don't get dull; remember to put life in your work.

"Another thing," he continued. "The ideas of Tired Business Men, I find, are apt to be unduly conservative, reactionary. They—I'm speaking in a general sense, you understand, without any personal application—they appear to be out of touch with any of the under-current of the age, so when they do write fiction, it sounds like something written by Disraeli. You ought to avoid that," he said, shaking his head.

"I shall follow your suggestion and avoid that failing," I said. "When I find myself getting too reactionary and conservative I'll remember our talk."

"This is a liberal age," he continued. "Some of the most beautiful books of recent times have been written in support of liberalism. Prose like Walter Pater's—some of them. What is the plot of your novel?"

"I haven't any plot. It occurred to me that I would simply put some characters together, and see what would happen. I hope the characters will do something of their own accord. If I keep them talking long enough maybe they will talk themselves into a mess of some kind. That's the way it is in life."

"But a work of fiction is not like life," he said. "Life is an endless stream, while a work of fiction begins and

ends sharply. It is self-contained, a world within itself, and must not have any loose ends ravelling out into space and time, while actual life is nothing but loose ends. Fiction must follow a conventional pattern, that is, if it is to be literature. I assume that you are trying to write real literature. Is that so?"

"Oh, yes, literature is my aim," I said. "I want to be literary."

"Well then, you should keep in mind," the Great Author continued, "that a work of fiction must have a definite motif; there must be a stage of preparation, a problem, an emotional conflict, and a denouement. Over the whole you must cast the illusion of reality. . . . And then, besides that, one must have suffered before one writes. Have you suffered?"

I replied that I had suffered a lot.

"Good," he replied positively. "Through suffering one knows life."

"I'm glad to have learned that," I said, "and thank you so much." I started to go, but he graciously talked on, in the spacious manner of men who have already accomplished most of their life's work.

"Long ago," he said, in the way of pleasant reminiscence, "when I was writing light, ephemeral fiction, my practice—and I found it quite successful—was to create my principal characters, and then let them stand, and gain texture, for years sometimes, before I used them in a book." He tapped the corner of his mahogany desk musingly with his slender white fingers. "Flaubert did that, too, you know," he added, in a tone of reverence.

"You mean that I ought not to make them and slap them

right in the book before they are good and dry," I said.

"Well, if you do," he dogmatized, "they'll be half-baked. You can only attain reality by giving them time, and all powerful fiction is a reflection of reality."

4

The Great Author gave me good advice. The longer I thought of it the more clearly I realized the soundness of what he had told me. I knew I would need a fine, strong character early in the book, so I created Michael Webb at once.

"Michael," I said, laying my hand on his shoulder, "you are ahead of your time, my lad, but I start you early so you will have a chance to grow. I don't want *you* to be half-baked."

He was a gangling, unformed, shy youth of twenty, with the large-foot, big-hand look of most boys of that age. His dusty, unpressed blue suit seemed too loose in some places and too tight in others.

"Yes, sir," he said meekly, "when do you think I shall be needed?"

"Now, let me see. You're twenty now. You'll be needed in fourteen years," I calculated. "Yes, that's right. You will be thirty-four years old when you come in the book, so you have fourteen years before you. Of course, you understand that this is fourteen years according to your time. It is only three hours clock time, and one chapter book time."

"I see," he remarked, as if he understood it perfectly, though I do not believe he saw it at all. "I see—it's four-

teen years of my time. That's all I am interested in. I don't care how long it is of anybody else's time."

"Well, then count on fourteen years, and you'd better be here then. A little ahead of time would be better. It would be terrible if the book had to stop because you couldn't be found."

"Oh, I'll be here," he said casually, and in the jaunty tone that young men use when they accept huge responsibilities. "What shall I do first—right now?"

He looked lonely and wistful standing there. His head seemed too big for his slender body. There was something pathetic in his drooping pose, in the dead-weight dangling of his hands, and even in the way his cheap little memorandum book and pencil stood in his vest-pocket. I felt a desire to give him twenty dollars, but I restrained myself. One can never tell about these youngsters. No doubt Rockefeller looked pathetic when he went round in his youth trying to find a job. Suppose you had given him twenty dollars then? What life-long regret!

"What ought you to do first?" I repeated. "Let me see, now. What shall you do?" I had no idea what he ought to do, but I had to say something, so I ventured, "I think the first thing you ought to do is to get yourself a family."

"You mean—marry?" he asked.

"No, not necessarily. I mean get yourself ancestors, parents, relatives. You've got to have them."

"How shall I go about getting into a family? With me already twenty years old, and all that," he said doubtfully. "They'll know I'm a——"

"No, they won't," I interrupted. "Just pick out a good family and slide right into it. They'll have the Illusion of

Reality and will think you have been there all along. . . . I advise you to select a nice, rich family while you are about it."

I shook hands with him then and told him good-bye.

5

As time went by, I heard very little of Michael, and finally, to my disappointment, he dropped out of sight, although letters came from him for three or four years at long intervals.

His letters were inconsequential to an extreme degree, and always read about like this: "Stockholm, Sweden. Have been here six weeks. Have good job. This is a fine place. Am having a grand time. Lots of pretty girls here. My next address is Algiers." . . . He believed in brevity.

When he remembered to give his address I always wrote him. My letters contained sound, sober advice and maxims that I got from Poor Richard's Almanac. I bought a copy of this wonderful old book just for that purpose, for it seemed to me that there was nothing else quite so suitable in correspondence with a young man.

To far away places like Constantinople, Buenos Aires, Paris, and Bombay, I sent him bits of wisdom like these:

He makes a foe who makes a jest.

Eat few suppers and you'll need few medicines.

He that falls in love with himself will have no rivals.

Experience keeps a dear school, but fools will learn of no other.

After he had been gone about three years I ran across a seafaring man who told me that he had seen a young man named Michael Webb peddling chocolate bars among the sailors on a wharf at Valparaiso. I know it was our Michael Webb, on account of having just received a post-card from him marked Valparaiso, on which he had written: "This is a grand place. The saloons keep open on Sundays. Have a fine job."

The last letter I got from him came from Singapore. It contained nothing but these lines:

To have my way, in spite of your tongue and reason's teeth,
tastes better than Hungary wine; and my heart beats in a honey-
pot now I reject you and all sober sense.

I recognized this as a quotation from an old book which is practically unknown except to students of English literature. I came to the conclusion that Michael had finally changed his ways, and had gone to Singapore to study English literature, and was letting me know of his erudition. I replied at once, saying: "He that hath a trade hath an estate," but he never wrote again.

6

And I did not hear of him again until I ran across him at the Dumbles' Cosmic Evening, where he seemed to be a person of importance.

Chapter Two

Michael Encounters Advertising Psychology

I

MY experience with Michael Webb was not at all unusual. It is a common occurrence in the novel-writing industry for characters to get lost or misplaced in one way or another. Sometimes these wandering characters are never found, and after a time they settle down in Chicago or Jacksonville—or somewhere else—raise large families and turn into bores of the most humdrum variety. Perhaps you have heard people speak of some one who has just passed, saying, "That person's a character"; and usually there is a general craning of necks and a titter of amusement. I never knew what that meant until after my disappointment with Michael Webb.

2

After leaving the Dumble apartment Michael walked up Broadway in a reflective mood, looking neither to right nor left. He told me of this long afterward, and of his amusing adventure at Broadway and 43rd Street. It was the hour when the crowds are streaming from the theatres, and Broadway in the Forties turns into an agitated current of

people and motors. These shoals of people swam into his abstracted vision with the flatness of figures painted on canvas.

He saw the world as a panorama of ideas, and the chemistry of his mind habitually resolved people and things into their dynamic forces.

That all human values are false, and that life has some esoteric and unknown—perhaps unknowable—meaning, was a belief that had grown up spontaneously in his mind. He had believed it so long that he did not remember when he believed anything else. In later years he had begun to suspect that the esoteric meaning was nothing but a huge Olympian joke. As an absolute philosophy this belief is deadly. It easily defeats the human spirit in single combat, and thereafter all achievements, however noble or brilliant, are comparable to the antics of a knockabout vaudeville team.

But this was not an absolute conviction in Michael Webb's mind—it was merely a surmise—a reservation which saved him from the fate of laughing himself to death. The gods may be joking with us, he thought, but jokes are never made of thin air; they are simply caricatures of reality. Behind the crass, humorous futility of things he felt that there must be something ponderable and matter-of-fact. If he were able to thrust his mind through the curtains that stand before the awesome face of Truth, like an exploring hand reaching into a dark closet, he knew he would grasp something that is still and eternal.

As he walked up Broadway, among the crowds and under the flaring yellow lights, his mind leaped here and there, like an animal trapped in a room. It pawed at the

cracks where faint gleams of truth came shining through. Here was a gleam from the atom, with its electrons whirling in an emptiness that was both immense and infinitely small. Here was a gleam from the rippling ether, through which mind spoke to mind from afar; and here was mind itself, into which a stream of consciousness pours and creates images of an outside Something which may or may not exist at all. Here was, too, the recurrent miracle of Spring; and here was man himself, aspiring and pathetic, silly and sensual, bravely marching into darkness.

Like millions of men before him, Michael Webb attempted to look at the unknowable, but the curtain with its painted and grinning faces silently closed at his touch. He felt then, as he had often felt before, that all humanity was engaged in some vast travesty, and that philosophy, science, history, and metaphysics were merely the beating of hollow drums.

The mind recoils from such thoughts as instinctively as it does from a contemplation of the origin of God. Michael was caught by this intellectual recoil and stood motionless, transfixed and witless, while the theatre crowd surged around him.

Across the way there was a gigantic chewing gum sign on the roof of a building. A gorgeous blaze of light poured from a framework almost as large as a battleship. This sign is one of the wonders of the modern world, and is supposed to possess an extraordinary magic. The new magic—not the old. At short intervals six attenuated geometrical figures of men leap into being on the velvet blackness of a huge blank space. These figures perform some athletic exercises with agile arms and legs of fire, while the

name of the chewing gum quivers and flickers above them. The whole contrivance fades out, and then rushes to life again with a violence that strikes the vision like the explosion of a shell. One is amazed that such a dynamic thing can move without a cataract of noise.

Michael Webb had seen this display a thousand times—but now, with sharply cleared senses, he gazed at it with the wonderment of a small child. Plastered against the wall, he looked over the heads of the people and laughed aloud.

A pleasant-looking young man came up and stood beside him. "I see you're interested in our big show," he said, touching Michael on the arm, and pointing to the sign. "I'm in that business, and just for curiosity I would like to know just what you like about it. Get your reaction, you know."

"I like everything about it," Michael replied. "It's a good show, and doesn't irritate the mind as lots of shows do, but still I don't understand its cosmic significance."

"Cosmic significance?" the young man repeated vaguely.

"Yes, what's it for? What's the idea?" Michael said.

"Why, it's to advertise our chewing gum. To sell our product. What did you think it was for?" The young man gave Michael a searching look.

"Oh, yes, I see. . . . I get the idea, but it's rather obscure. The name of your chewing gum is there, but I shouldn't think that would help. That is, in selling the stuff."

"Thousands and thousands of people see that name every night," the young man proudly asserted. "That's the answer."

"They might take it as a warning," said Michael with hesitation. "Thousands of people see scarlet fever signs on houses and they don't run right off and get scarlet fever. They stay away from it. Don't you really suppose that sign keeps lots of people from buying your chewing gum?"

"Why, no. Don't you understand the psychology of advertising? You look like an intelligent person."

"No, I don't understand it," Michael replied. "You've just said that you suspect me of being an intelligent person. I can't let that pass. I throw your suspicion back in your face, and I'll go even further. I accuse you of being one."

The young man looked mystified. "Accuse me of being what?" he asked.

"Of being an intelligent person."

"All right, I'll agree to that," the young man laughed. "Then what?"

"Well, as an intelligent person, it's your duty to explain to me the psychology of advertising."

"Why my duty?"

"Because you know it, and I don't. If you had a thousand dollars in your pocket and a starving man should ask you for a dime you would give it to him, wouldn't you? If you refuse to explain the psychology of advertising to me I shall follow you down the street with mind outstretched and accuse you publicly of intellectual parsimony. When I tell people that you refused me the psychology of advertising they'll be pretty mad, let me tell you."

The young man shifted his feet uneasily, and took Michael by the arm. "Look here," he said. "I can give you the psychology of that sign in a few words"—he

pointed to it—"our idea is to attract attention by movement—those grotesque dancing figures, lights flashing, and so on—and at the same time we impress upon the beholder the name of our product. He remembers it by association with these figures—and these same curious dancing men are on our packages of gum—so you see. . . . It's the well-known law of association."

"Well-known what?" Michael inquired.

"Law of association. It's psychology. We advertise by inference. The idea of our product is associated with these figures."

Michael drew himself up stiffly and looked the young man full in the face.

"Oh, ho, I smell a rat here," he said emphatically. "What are you fellows trying to put over on the public? This thing must be investigated."

"I don't get you," the young man said.

"Now I see the whole scheme. You are using the law of association—but not in the way you said. Your sign says as plainly as the law of association can say it that if one buys your gum and chews and chews for months and months the buyer will lose weight, grow thin, and be athletic—and go about doing stunts. It won't do it, and there is no use your claiming that it will."

"We make no such claim," the young man said hotly.

"But you do," Michael replied. "I'll choke you on your own logic. You go back on your own advertising. If you want to know what I think—I think you're a pretty sly fellow. People all over this country are chewing this minute like cows, hoping to be thin and athletic and dancers just because they saw that sign——"

"I tell you we make no such claim."

"That's what you say, but your sign contradicts you. Huh! So that's your trick. . . . When people don't get thin from chewing your gum you tell 'em the sign doesn't mean that. . . . I'm going to write to the newspapers about it."

"Oh, go on, you nut," the young man said and turned his back on Michael. Neither of them spoke again. The young man left in a moment, but stopped at the corner and made some remark to a policeman. They both turned and looked at Michael, and the policeman laughed. Then the young man laughed.

3

While these events were occurring I was on my way uptown to my bachelor apartment in Madison Avenue, with Michael Webb's address in my pocket. I was thrilled with excitement.

The famous Michael Webb! So Mrs. Dumble had said. I resolved to find out first why Michael Webb was famous; and then call on him and get our novel started.

Chapter Three

The Importance of Being Second-rate

I

I REMEMBER going one time, as a boy, more than ten miles with my father to catch a glimpse of a member of the legislature. It was a steaming August day, and the celebrity wore a black frock coat and a tall silk hat. As he drove through the village street the famous man lifted his hat to the applause of the crowd, and each time his hat was raised he mopped his bald head with a handkerchief.

In those days it was a rare thing to be famous. Now it's different. The world is chock-full of celebrities; one is elbowed and crowded by them on every side.

“. . . You see that man over there?" says Jones, talking out of the corner of his mouth, his cigar clenched between his teeth.

"Yes, I see him," you reply.

"Well, that's Sternfeld, the plunger. He has just cleaned up a million in Wall Street."

"You don't say?"

"Yes, sir," Jones continues. "A clean, cool million—so I've heard."

As your only adventure in Wall Street ended in a net loss of eight hundred dollars incurred in maintaining a pathetic belief that Baldwin Locomotive had no top, you endeavor diplomatically to change the subject. "It's a fine day," you remark briskly. "Have you ever seen lovelier weather than this in March?"

"Yes, it's a fine day," Jones agrees indifferently and leans across the table so you can hear him better. "Do you know what that guy Sternfeld did? Well, sir, I'll tell you. Sold Baldwin Locomotive short at the very top. The country was full of suckers who kept on buying it—they thought it never would stop going up. Sternfeld knew better; he's a sharp, brainy manipulator. Sold it at the very top, and kept on selling it short all the way down. . . . You see where he is to-day. That's his Rolls-Royce out there. Cleaned up a million."

"I see . . . and that girl he's talking to? What did she clean up?"

"Oh, that girl! She's famous, too." Jones gravely takes a fifty-cent piece from his pocket and holds it up for your inspection. "See the resemblance?" he says.

"You mean she looks like fifty cents? Oh, no, you're doing the girl an injustice. She looks like two dollars at least."

"No, no, no," he says. "See that female head on the coin? That's her head. She's the model for the head on the silver money. The government offered a reward, you know. Best profile. . . . Just take a look. Ever see a nose as perfect as that?"

Jones looks at you triumphantly, and puts the coin back in his pocket. "I know her," he chuckled. "Know her very

well. I know Sternfeld, too—that is, I've shaken hands with him."

You pay the luncheon check and creep home through glittering streets lined with billboards announcing "Douglas Fairbanks in a Million-Dollar Super-Film," and finally arrive at your own apartment, where *Vanity Fair* has just been delivered by the postman. . . . Try as hard as ever you can, it is impossible to escape famous people. This is one of the most depressing facts in life.

And now Michael Webb is famous. We shall turn back the pages of history and see how it all came about.

2

Michael's celebrity began with the publication of a weighty scientific work entitled *The Importance of Being Second-Rate*.

This book appeared after two arduous years spent in its preparation. During this period he was surrounded by forty-two secretaries. In addition to the secretaries, he employed a well-trained staff of theory-nursers, doctors of philosophy, second-raters, library-workers, and typists.

More than sixty thousand typewritten pages were turned over to the publisher. This would have made a work of eighty-six volumes, which the publisher—a mean-spirited person—said was impossible. He claimed that the writing was verbose, and returned the sixty thousand-page manuscript to the author, with an urgent request that it be cut down to a reasonable length. Michael Webb spent three months looking over the pages with a blue pencil in his hand, and then reported to the publisher that he had not

been able to find a single paragraph that seemed unnecessary or a phrase devoid of substance.

The publisher thereupon hired a staff of pessimists to effect the requisite elimination. After reading the whole work, their opinion was that there were *only thirty-eight pages* which appeared to have any real value. . . . The discussion between Michael and the pessimists has itself been made the subject of a book of four hundred pages, which has been published since our hero rose to fame.

In the end, Michael maintained his stand against the pessimists so well that five hundred and twenty pages of his manuscript were saved, and so the book was published.

The Importance of Being Second-Rate is a high-powered, philosophical treatise. A work of dignity.

Every one does not agree with Michael Webb in his conclusions, but the most hostile critics grant him the true philosophic touch. The book even contradicts itself, and promotes the welfare of the literary industry by providing work for numerous commentators! When it first appeared, these contradictions were laughed at; but as the Second-Rate idea gathered strength and momentum, and swept the country like an intellectual avalanche, men of an analytical turn began to study the book seriously. They subjected it to the fierce white light of the higher criticism and proved—I think, conclusively—that these apparent contradictions were only superficial, and without bearing on the essential, generative spirit of the work.

The author depicts vividly the course of the great Second-Rate Revolution which began long ago and has recently come to an end with an obliteration of all hazy first-rate ideas and methods. This revolution, silent and slow-mov-

ing, has effected a profound change in civilization. The world has now entered into the Age of Authoritative Mediocrity—the most glorious in human history.

What is Second-Rate? . . . This question leaps to the tongue. The answer is simple. Second-Rate is only another name for practical commonsense. But Michael Webb goes further in his definition, and reveals the infinite implications of the Second-Rate as an energizing motive in human affairs. Like all great philosophers, he puts into crystalline phrases the amorphous thought of his time—ideas which people have had all along, but which they have been too timid—over-awed by tradition—to assert. He identifies morality with practical commonsense. Proving that immorality is impractical and unprofitable, he then turns his arguments inside out, like a man turning the sleeves of a coat, and demonstrates that only the Practical can be Moral. The reader will understand that what I say here is only the meagre skeleton of his thought. I give in a few sentences what he says in five hundred pages of philosophical argument, accompanied by elaborate references and inky-fingered library-work. I merely state his case. He proves it.

Commonsense belongs exclusively to the second-rate intellect. First-raters, in all ages, have been devoid of both commonsense and morality. The early Christians—he points out—were first-raters, but they did not have enough commonsense to fill a thimble, and allowed themselves to get so unpopular that they were turned over to the Zoological Gardens as nourishment for the lions.

Was this moral?

It was not, our author concludes. The fate of the Chris-

tian religion was in their keeping, but they had no sense of responsibility. Suppose the lions had eaten all of them? In that case there would be no Christian religion to-day. They did not stop to think of that. Happily, there were not enough lions to go around.

Christopher Columbus was a first-rater. He had to be, for no second-rate mind would have ever had the fantastic idea of sailing across the ocean on a wild-goose chase. It is true he discovered a new continent—and that's all right in its way, but when you come right down to brass tacks, what did Columbus himself get out of it? *Nothing*. That statue in Columbus Circle is pretty poor comfort to a man who died in poverty, and has been dead four hundred years.

Leonardo da Vinci was a first-rater—had five different professions—was an expert in all of them—and could never make a really good living. Read his history. He was continually begging money from the Italian princes.

Professor Albert Einstein is one of the eminent first-raters of our time. What's he got? *Nothing*. He lives on his salary of one bushel of paper marks a month—amounting to thirty-five dollars in real money. Before long—Michael Webb predicts—you will hear of some piteous appeal on the part of a committee to raise money for Einstein, the great first-rater, to pay off a mortgage on the old home.

In all ages of history first-raters have endeavored to force themselves and their ideas into public notice. Their theories, scribblings, daubs, revolts, suggestions, and vapors clutter the corridors of history. . . . Sometimes they have succeeded in attracting attention, with a consequent disturbance of things, and generally with disastrous re-

sults to themselves. A really new idea, our author argues, is as deadly as dynamite; and it almost invariably returns to its originator and blows his head off.

Now, fortunately, through the final success of the second-rate revolution, mankind is organized into a compact body of resistance, and the danger of first-rate thought is receding into the past.

The trouble with the world, Michael Webb says, is mainly psychological. Tradition always outlives its seed of reality. Ideas and forces which were once powerful pass away, but their empty shell remains. To-day, although Second-Rate is actually the dominating force of the modern world, we have a general—even if ineffectual—cult of the first-rate. Colleges, newspapers, professional optimists, lecturers, and cheer-leaders still deluge mankind with feeble first-rate maxims.

Thousands of graduates come from our colleges every year drugged with intellectual laudanum. Their naïve, pathetic belief in the potency of the first-rate is comparable only to the faith of a voodoo conjurer in his charms of bones and cow hair.

Even the public spectacle of our fine line of second-rate presidents has no effect on these young men and women. . . . The result is an appalling disillusionment! Not only that. Sometimes the virus spreads even to experienced business men, and they become the victim of first-rate impulses. . . . And the authors! Their pitiable first-rate books. The puny, thin-chested worst sellers!

“Shall our people be forever condemned to drink this poisoned cup?” writes Michael Webb with dramatic emphasis. “Must mankind forever wear this crown of thorns?”

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The opportunities open to the second-rate mind are greater to-day than ever before in history, says Michael Webb in his historic book. Particularly in the United States. Here in this great and smiling land of America there is a place for every one—and every one should know his place and keep it.

Yet how few rise to success and power? Why? Because the methods of nine men out of every ten are wrong. In Chapter XV he gives his invaluable rules for success, which should be memorized and repeated three times a day—morning, noon and night—by all who wish to rise, step by step, on the ladder of success. If these ten rules are memorized, carefully repeated according to directions, and scrupulously followed, success is guaranteed by the author. The ten rules are:

1. Believe in yourself—you're all right.
2. Believe in your fellow-man—he's all right.
3. Be pleasant—the voice with the smile wins.
4. Be reserved—a clattering tongue is dangerous.
5. Be cautious—don't experiment.
6. Be solvent—save a little every day.
7. Be a worker—drones have no honey.
8. Be open-hearted, open-minded, open-handed.
9. Be respectful—the world was here before you came.
10. Be American—a prince of God's green footstool.

These second-rate maxims, known as "Webb's Ten Little B's," were copied from the book by an enterprising printer. He set them up on a milk-white card, surrounded by a border of yellow bees. There was a cord attached for the purpose of hanging them over a desk. More than fifteen

million were sold and the printer went out of the game with a large fortune.

3

At first the book was a flat failure. Only eight hundred copies were sold in six months. The reviews were unfavorable, and in some cases hilarious. In newspaper offices the volume was used as a weight to keep the door from blowing shut.

Then appeared Mr. and Mrs. Garrity Thoms. I do not know where they came from. They simply appeared. A copy of *The Importance of Being Second-Rate* was left by somebody on a train-seat and so fell into their possession. They were professional organizers, and with them to read was to act. They organized the first Second-Rate Club before they had read the book through. And after that they were too busy to read it at all.

Mrs. Thoms was a majestic woman dressed in a blue velvet creation reminiscent of the early 1900's. You know what I mean—flat, form-fitting, high bust, and stiff collar with cheap lace around it. On her breast she wore an improbable pie-plate brooch of gold. That, and the cluster of diamond rings on her hand, were all she ever displayed in the way of ornament. "Simply a matter of taste," she explained. "I have a casket full of jewels at home."

Mr. Garrity Thoms was a smallish man with protruding eyes, a wrinkled skin and sandy whiskers. His habitual air was one of furtive melancholy. He was considered thoughtful. He never attracted any attention until he began to make a speech, and then everybody within a quarter of a

mile stopped work and listened. Off the platform he was a dud; on it he was an exploding ammunition dump.

The Second-Rate Club idea spread like a prairie fire. Mr. and Mrs. Thoms received one dollar for each new member, so they moved fast while the going was good.

"I and my husband are giving up *everything* for the cause," the enthusiastic Mrs. Thoms beamed in a newspaper interview, her sentences splashed with italics. "And, oh, what *joy* and *pleasure* it is to serve! We are whole heart and soul in the movement. Our *every* thought is second-rate. We live and breathe in a second-rate atmosphere. Though we have never *regretted* our sacrifice, there are times of course when we get a *little* wee bit discouraged. But not for long. When we think of what second-rate *means* to humanity we are inspired to do our very best."

The Bible of the movement—*The Importance of Being Second-Rate*—sold to the extent of twenty thousand in four weeks; then there was an edition of fifty thousand; and next came an order for one hundred thousand. Reviewers began to look over the book again. Doors slammed back and forth in the wind while the door-weight was dusted off and taken up to the managing editor to inspect.

Michael Webb held strangely aloof from the second-rate movement. He even returned the ten cents that Mr. and Mrs. Garrity Thoms sent him—an entirely voluntary payment—for each member enrolled.

Then came his sensational "Warning." It was published in newspapers in every part of the country. In this historic document Michael pointed out to second-raters that although the movement was making tremendous progress there was a tiny cloud in the sky. The second-rate intel-

lect, he warned, is one that is peculiarly susceptible to the devastating inroads of bunk, just as certain types of physique are subject to tuberculosis. An epidemic of bunk, he wrote in his terse manner, among the Second-Rate Clubs would be one of the most appalling catastrophes of history . . . little was accomplished by his warning. He was considered an alarmist.

The work of organization swept on with electric speed. Communities enrolled to a man—or until the badges and buttons gave out. Men who were not even second-raters, carried away by the popular enthusiasm, became charter members of the local clubs. First-raters were found in the ranks and expelled.

4

In June of that year the first National Convention of Second-Rate Clubs met in Washington. . . . The office of Chief Second-Rater was created and offered to Michael Webb. He declined it in an eloquent telegram in which he declared that he was unworthy of the honor—that men much more second-rate than he could ever hope to be were in the clubs, and that they should be considered. The contest became an open one, with numerous candidates, all of whom had vociferous backers.

Now the curtain rises upon a scene of political strategy without a parallel in American public life. I refer to the events which led to the election of Timothy Bray as Chief Second-Rater.

Timothy Bray's whole career—and it is an illustrious one—has been devoted to the suppression of printed vice. He

is a person of pleasing moral pulchritude. Physically he is only moderately beautiful. At the age of ten he courageously seized some postcards of bathing suit girls which were exhibited for sale at a village store, and running off with them, he refused to give them up even when detected. His family, impressed by the moral beauty of the boy's mind, paid for the cards, and the incident came to a close. This was the beginning of his activities, and from that time he has gone on and on. His enemies, a tiny band of first-raters, call him, even to-day, the "Peeping Tom of literature," but their sarcasm is only the feeble squawk of defeat.

As a matter of plain historical veracity, I must say that Bray deserves more credit than he has ever received. He is a retiring person, little given to the vicious habit of boasting of his own achievements, and in consequence much of his best thought—particularly in literary criticism—is known only to his intimate friends.

I am in a position to assert that Timothy Bray *has actually discovered* the fourth dimension of literature, but has kept it a secret, through a sense of modesty. He is perhaps the only man in the world to-day who can calculate in terms of the literary fourth dimension. That explains his suppression of a number of books which really appeared to the naked eye to be harmless; his fourth dimensional calculations demonstrated that they were in fact acridly obscene.

This whole matter is interesting, though profoundly esoteric and long-winded, and I must dismiss it for the present. When fully launched in my literary career I intend to take up the life and works of Timothy Bray, and present

his opinions on ideas and books to the world in such form that he will stand in his proper place in the Valhalla of distinguished men.

In the confused contest for Chief Second-Rater, Bray conceived a Napoleonic idea which proves, for the millionth time, that action is more effective than mere talk. Remember—in reading this—that his position as a candidate was not an easy one. Opposed to him were some of the trickiest second-rate minds of our time. This opposition, like the clash of steel and flint, served only to produce the spark that fired the genius of Timothy Bray.

There was in circulation, at that period, some literary scribblings, published in a tome bearing the strange title of *Jurgen*.

It was the author of *Jurgen* that W. B. Yeats had in his mind's eye—so I believe—when he wrote of “those who give themselves up to images and the murmurings of images.” Of a certainty we find images here, stirring and murmuring. This screed purported to be the authentic history of a certain Duke Jurgen who fared forth and journeyed in foreign lands. At one place he stopped overnight and engaged a queen in conversation. During his talk, which consisted of trivial boastings, he showed the queen his sword, a curious weapon which had served him well in his travels.

Hard put to it for campaign ammunition, Timothy Bray calculated the fourth dimension of this incident and came to the conclusion that *Jurgen* was literary poison ivy. Thereupon he had the book seized, destroyed, and given the witch's curse.

Such deeds as this sway the multitude with their dra-

matic quality. Comparable incidents are Paul Revere's ride and Napoleon's "*ma couronne vient du pont d'Arcole.*"

Upon returning to the convention Bray was overwhelmed with acclaim. Entire state delegations went wild. Men who were there recollect with a thrill that memorable march around the hall—three thousand delegates tramping to the sound of a rhythmic chant, "Bray, Bray, we want Bray." The golden bars of western sunlight fell on a sea of white, excited faces and the flaring colors of a thousand flags. Timothy Bray, tears streaming down his face, stood on the platform, his arms outspread in canonical blessing. . . . The fitting climax of an enterprising career—the Chief Second-Rater of the United States.

5

The monkey wrench, thrown by Michael Webb from afar, landed in the convention's gears with a ripping, tearing sound. . . . In short, he sent a statement broadcast over the country that the suppression of *Jurgen* was bunk of one hundred per cent density—that Bray himself was riddled, through and through, with a case of congenital bunk—and that Mr. and Mrs. Garrity Thoms had ladled out bunk so long that they were immune to its venom, otherwise it would have killed them long ago.

"What is wrong with showing a sword to a queen?" he demanded hotly. "With my own eyes I have seen the queen of England drive out of Buckingham Palace accompanied by an escort of the Horse Guards, every man carrying a sword."

There was consternation—and a tremendous row—in the

Convention. The Second-Raters' organization was split into two factions. . . . Bray, in an impassioned speech, flatly accused Michael Webb of being a first-rater. His eloquence carried the day, and Michael was expelled from the organization. But at least half the membership of the Clubs still believed in him, and they deserted the movement in a body. The disintegration of Second-Rate as a compact force began at that time.

6

So that is how Michael Webb became a celebrated character.

As I write these lines it occurs to me that, although everybody wants to be famous, very few give any thought to the welfare of Fame himself. Talk about overwork! Talk about the eight-hour day! Fame starts in at seven in the morning, and often the hour of nine in the evening finds him still at the office, tired and worried, and trying to get somebody's picture in next morning's newspaper.

Suppose we take a look into the house of Fame, and see how the poor old pack-horse is getting on. . . . You'd better be interested in this, and try to think up some plan for giving Fame a short vacation—even if nothing more than two weeks in the Catskills—or he may break down some day with all of us intellectual *élite* on his back.

7

Fame came home late after a hard day, and was cross and irritable. When the meal was over he lay down on

the couch for a little nap. He was enormous in size, and the handkerchief which he laid over his moon-like countenance barely covered his nose and eyes. As he slept, his measured snoring sounded like a trombone solo.

His wife, Notoriety, sat by the lamp and placidly knitted a sweater. Their two children, Publicity and Scandal, played noisily with the dog. The dog's name was Merit.

"Come now, children." Notoriety looked over her spectacles and shook a warning finger at her exuberant progeny. "You mustn't make so much noise. Your poor, overworked papa's asleep. He has been trying so hard to do something for General Pershing, and is all discouraged and fagged out."

For thirty seconds the children were fairly quiet. Then they began to tease Merit again, and the dog's yapping caused Notoriety to look up sharply.

"That dog must be put right out of this house. You hear me now, children," she said. "How often have I told you that you must not bring him in after dinner! I don't like that wretched little beast."

The children appeared crestfallen. Publicity (God bless his little silver tongue) stood at his mother's knee and pleaded, "Mother, please let us play with Merit until bedtime. We won't let him make any noise or anything." . . . The ribby yellow dog looked up at Notoriety and wagged his tail.

"No, your father is asleep and you mustn't play," she said. "That dog brings fleas in the house, anyway. I mean it now, children; you must go and put him out."

There was no help for it. Merit had to get out, and for a while the little dears sat and pouted. Suddenly Scan-

dal exclaimed, "Oh, mother, tell me, is daddy hollow inside?"

"Why, of course not," Notoriety answered. "What a question!"

"A girl at school to-day said he is," Scandal prattled. "She said our daddy is hollow inside and is filled with nothing but hot air."

"You shouldn't listen to remarks about the family," she said to Scandal. "It will take all your time to listen to nasty remarks about other people and repeat them."

Just then Fame awoke with a loud, gaping "*Yah!*" He rubbed his eyes, looked around a bit, and brought his fist down on his knee with a smack. "*Blast it!*" he said emphatically. . . . "Oh, blast it!" he repeated.

"What's the matter, dear? Didn't you enjoy your nap?" Notoriety asked.

"Sure, I enjoyed my nap all right," Fame replied, "but I was thinking of what I have on hand for to-morrow."

"A new job?"

"Y-yes, a new job. I'll say so! One of these confounded philosophers. A fellow named Michael Webb, the de-bunking specialist. Has written something about the power of the second-rate mind, I believe. *The rotter*. Just did it to make me work. I got to take him in hand to-morrow, and——" His voice trailed away inaudibly, and he rambled off to bed.

I must say in fairness to Fame that he did his part. There were invitations to teas where Michael was expected to sit with a cup of tea and a crumbly cake on his knee and talk about psychology—news films in which he was shown strolling across a lawn—invitations to address women's

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clubs on "The Masculine Second-Rater"—telegraphic requests from enterprising news syndicates for his opinion on the financial policy of the government and the best method of controlling floods on the Mississippi—photographs in the Sunday picture sections of Michael sitting in his library with his tomcat on his knee—pictures of him making a forty-foot putt,—pictures of him conversing with Mrs. Algernon Stipple at Palm Beach—pictures of him giving a colored man a quarter.

The whole thing would have been going on yet if Michael had not started the nation-wide discussion in the Second-Rate Clubs.

One day Fame went home, threw his hat on the table, and said to his family, "I'm through with him. I'm off that Webb guy for life. He's spilled the beans by getting in a row over that wretched Jurgen."

Chapter Four

Thinking Done by the Day or Week

I

THE sallow-faced young man in the corner of Michael Webb's ante-room hammered jauntily on a typewriter while I amused myself with the *Dial* and the *Popular Science Monthly* which I found on the table. I had called to renew my acquaintance with Michael.

The young man was in his shirt sleeves, and a cigarette hung pendulously from his lips. The place had a newspaperly look. The hungry floors and stark wooden partitions were obviously the work of some decorator impressed by the restrained style of the New York *American's* editorial rooms. At any moment I expected to see a worried and shabby man, with a dead cigar in his mouth and his hands full of typewritten sheets, come through the door. This flair for simplicity was carried out even in the smaller details. There was a green shade on the hanging electric light, and its cord ran overhead in plain and unostentatious loops.

Presently the young man got up and handed me a flimsy piece of printed cardboard. "That's our business card," he announced with an air of pride untouched by misgivings.

"I thought you might put it in your pocket and show it to your friends."

It was an atrocious piece of printing, and too large to go in one's pocket without folding. The upper part was occupied by a poorly executed engraving of a boy's face, with puffed-out cheeks, blowing a trumpet. Below that one read: *Michael Webb; Thinking Done by the Day or the Week*. It was evidently intended as a piece of advertising literature, but the tone of the thing was so crude that a Kansas City barber would have been ashamed of it.

At a loss as to what I ought to say—he evidently anticipated some remark—I mechanically turned it over and over in my hand. "Is it a joke?" was all I could think of saying.

"Why, no, it's no joke," he replied. He seemed a trifle irritated. "It's our business card. We give it out to people. A business card. You know what a business card is, don't you? It's impressive, isn't it?"

"No, I don't think it impressive." I thought I might as well be frank about it. "It's just a cheap, smudgy, undignified hand-bill."

"But it is impressive," he insisted. "I can see it impressed you."

"I was impressed by its unattractiveness. That's not constructive. Don't you see that for yourself? It repels people—probably keeps people from coming here."

He held the card off at arm's length and gazed at it with admiration. "Precisely," he said. "You're getting it now. It does keep lots of people from coming here. We advertise our thinking service with this card. You see the point? You get it? Nobody with any sense would pay any attention to this piece of advertising. When a man comes in

here with this card in his hand we know for a certainty that he's badly in need of our service. Eliminates curiosity-seekers and people who can think for themselves. The idea is pretty obvious."

"Are you Mr. Webb's assistant?" I asked.

"Yes—and no," he answered. "I am—and I ain't—I'm really his secretary, but I'm taking a course in de-bunking, and I've already done some few little odd jobs. Society bunk—the Four Hundred, and so on. That bunk's pretty thin. Almost any intelligent person can learn how to extract it in a few lessons." He lit a cigarette and sat on the table, with his legs swinging over the edge.

"Well, well," I commented. "So you're learning the art. I can understand readily that society bunk is the easiest to handle. A bunk of low vitality. Tell me—what kind of bunk is most difficult to extract?"

"Mr. Webb says—and he's an authority—that the God's own country bunk is the toughest variety known to science. You know—the bigger, better, brainier bunk. Gosh! You should see it in its advanced stages. It's terrible. Mr. Webb can't do much with it. The trouble is that you can't get anything whatever into the head of a patient who has it in its worst form. His skull will turn the edge of the finest drill. Mr. Webb is working now on a new process which may produce results. His idea is to slip some articles into the *American Magazine*—very cautiously—and get to the bunk-ridden patient that way—so he won't suspect he's under treatment."

"Oh, pshaw, you'll not do it that way," I remarked. "They'll never let you put anything like that in the *American Magazine*."

"Oh, they won't, eh?" He swung his legs joyfully and exulted. "Yes, they will. The articles will be sugar-coated, and they'll swallow them before they know it."

At that moment the door of the inner office opened and Michael Webb stood in the doorway. Clean-shaven, in his freshly pressed handsome gray suit, he looked like the junior partner of a Wall Street banking firm or a college professor of independent means who doesn't take his work very seriously. He beckoned me to enter, and I followed him into his office. Without looking at me, he sat at his desk and began to slit open a letter, after having pointed to a chair with his paper-cutter.

2

"Well, who are you and what d'you want?" he demanded briskly. "Did you come here through a personal recommendation or because of our advertising?" This all in one breath.

"Neither," I replied. "I'm the author."

He looked up with a sudden start. "Well, so you are," he said. He laid down the letter that he held in his hand. "By George, I shouldn't have recognized you if I'd met you in the street. . . . Yes, I remember that day we parted. Been a long time. . . . Do you know, you look sort of—do you see well?"

"I feel fairly well. Don't I look it?"

"I don't know. There's something changed about you. You look run down. Fagged out. I wasn't like that when I wrote my great book. Is that the way an author is supposed to look?"

"In a general sense, yes," I answered. "We're a thoughtful lot, and the strain of thinking——"

"I do thinking by the day or the week," he broke in with enthusiasm. "Thinking by the day or week on reasonable terms. Let me do your thinking for you. It won't cost much, and you'll get rid of that tired feeling. Say, 'pon my soul, there is an idea in that—I mean an idea for an advertisement. It will run like this: *Let me do your thinking and get rid of that tired feeling.* Now, that isn't bad, is it?"

The suggestion that he do the thinking for the novel appeared to be rather complicated. I had never heard of a character in a book doing the thinking for the author. It could be done, of course, but I knew it was not the standard practice, and there must be some union rule covering such a case. A leader of the fiction industry, like Arnold Bennett, would never permit it, I am sure.

"Well, I don't think it would do, Michael," I said, positively. "I don't mean the advertising, I mean your suggestion about doing the thinking. You—you see, you're just a character in the book."

"Yes, I know," he came back briskly, "but that's got nothing to do with it. I don't suppose you've ever written a book, but I've had experience in authorship. I wrote one."

"Yes, I've read it."

Michael had done more in a literary way than I thought. I did not know, at this time, that he was writing a weekly column of comment for *Humanity*. This column, printed under the caption, "The Boiling Pot," was signed *The Scribbler*. It was talked about a good deal, and the editors of

Humanity increased the public interest in it by keeping it anonymous.

"You've read *The Importance of Being Second-Rate*? Is that so?" he said.

"Yes—I've been reading it for the last two days. It is interesting. . . . On the whole, I think it would be the best plan all around for me to do my own thinking."

"All right. Think away. You can't blame me, as a business man, for offering my own wares."

As I sat listening to him I studied his appearance. . . . The Stevenson portrait is, I think, the best of the Michael Webb pictures, although Stevenson did idealize his sitter to a certain degree. The Stevenson painting shows the high forehead and the wide space between the eyes almost too clearly. None of the portraits gives the quality of his extraordinary blue eyes. They looked like vivid blue flames. I had only a shadowy glimpse of his face that evening at the Dumbles', but now I saw that he had a prominent Roman nose and a strong chin. He was of medium height, with a broad, deep chest. There was the impression of unusual physical strength.

He put his feet on his desk, and pushed a box of cigars toward me. I felt that I ought to make a little impersonal conversation, as a matter of courtesy, before plunging into the purpose of my visit.

"I've just made a literary discovery," I said, "while I was waiting out there. The *Dial* is simply the *Popular Science Monthly* translated into literature. Have you ever noticed that?"

"They *are* alike, aren't they?" he said, with quickened interest. "Both experimental. A new kind of cross-cut

saw in the *Popular Science Monthly* becomes one of those modern rasping poems in the *Dial*. They are very much alike . . . but no. It's superficial. You won't find any replica of Sherwood Anderson in the *Popular Science Monthly*. . . . There's a man," he continued, "who is trying to write of the impulses which lie beyond the margin of consciousness."

"You think well of him, eh?" I suggested. I was not interested much in Sherwood Anderson, but I was interested in Michael Webb, and I wanted to find out what he was thinking about.

"Yes, I do," he replied. "He's a sort of literary Edison, feeling his way through the human soul."

"Well, Michael," I commented. "I can't see how you can reconcile this admiration of Sherwood Anderson with your views expressed in *The Importance of Being Second-Rate*. Anderson evidently is not trying very hard to be second-rate. . . . Some people consider him a little bit crazy."

"I'm not surprised. Most first-raters are supposed to have a touch of insanity. They're a foolhardy lot. If Sherwood Anderson had come to me for advice I would have told him not to do what he's doing. These first-rate productions always bring woe, financial loss and trouble to the producer. Still, one must admire their recklessness. It's a form of heroism. The reward of the first-rater usually comes in the course of future generations. We're even beginning to think well of frowsy old Walt Whitman."

"Tell me frankly, Michael," I asked. "Do you think your book has done much good?"

"Sure. No doubt whatever about it. That cabinet is full

of letters from readers"—he pointed to a set of letter files that reached from the floor to the ceiling—"and a great many people come here to thank and bless. Then my personal advice is very fine, and is sought by thousands. I am doing a good work, if I do say it myself."

"See this man," he continued, opening a *Saturday Evening Post* that lay on his desk, and pointing to the name of Victor Lockland at the head of a story. "Lockland, the celebrated writer of short stories. He owes his success to me."

I smiled. There was promising stuff in Michael. I could see that he had the egotism of the truly great. "He does, eh?" I remarked. "How's that?"

"Listen, and I'll explain what I mean," he said briskly. "When I first knew Victor Lockland, he was a poor, half-famished poet—a real garret poet—living in a room under the roof. I remember that his bed was right under the skylight. He lay there and watched the wheeling stars and wrote poems that reminded me of the silver haze one sees among the trees at dusk. Occasionally he tried his hand at a story. They were shy, furtive pieces of prose, like tales whispered in a dream, and one of these queer little high-brow magazines printed them. Sometimes he earned as much as twelve dollars a week, when luck ran well.

"One day he came here and sat in that chair where you're sitting now, and poured out his epic of woe. It came out that he was desperately anxious to get in the big, popular magazines. He needed the money. The magazines sent his stories back to him with express train speed. If they would only linger over them a bit—he said—even that

would be a little encouraging, but they shot back as if they had touched some spring.

"I told him his stories were probably not second-rate—which would of course account for their rejection—and I asked him what they were about.

"He confessed that they were about life. I knew anything he'd write about life would be really human; and even before I had seen his attempts I suspected them of being first-rate.

"You should have seen the story he showed me. It would have opened your eyes as to how little practical sense a man can have and still survive. The story as he originally wrote it was a delicate, pensive thing like the work of James Stephens. There was something about it light and tranquil and yet deep—a still pool over which cloud-shadows drifted.

"After it had been rejected several times he had tried clumsily to camouflage it. Put on a happy ending, for one thing. You could see the nails where it was fastened on. Then he'd put in paragraphs imitating Irvin Cobb, and some baseball slang, and had given it a zippy, whizzing start.

"My goodness—I said to him—you can't fool people this way. Those editors are as smart as the devil. Before they had read three pages they saw that this story is first-rate, and so back it came, in spite of your disguises.

"But what shall I do—he said—in evident discouragement.

"Now, it's quite easy to get in these magazines for anybody who knows how to write good English, and can really tell a story, provided he possesses the essential trick."

“And what is the essential trick?” I asked. “I’d like to know that; I’m in for a literary career myself, you know, and just think how stunning it would be to see my name in the *Red Book* and *Saturday Evening Post*.”

“Well, I’m going to tell you . . . just what I told him. You literary fellows—I said to him—are always thinking about Tolstoi and Anatole France. You don’t use ordinary commonsense. You ought to study the advertising in the magazines just as carefully as you would study a manual of literature. . . .”

“Why did you tell him that?” I interrupted.

“Because in America the art of advertising has outgrown the art of creative writing. Advertising represents more clearly the spirit of the people than literature itself does. . . . And there’s another reason, too. Three-fourths of the income of the magazines comes from their advertisers—consequently the advertising idea permeates the whole thing. In advertising there are no really poor people, and no melancholy endings. Just fancy how silly an advertisement for chocolates would be if it ended: *And so she ate them and died*.

“Most of the characters in advertising are either waving flags at a college football game, or inspecting the beautiful new kitchen, or listening to music, or trying on natty suits of clothes. . . . I pointed this out to Lockland, and advised him to take his characters from the advertising—or, better still, just take the advertising and rewrite it.

“He still seemed confused, so to help him out I took up a magazine and we went over the advertising page by page. Finally we came to a page advertising somebody’s shredded cocoanut. We stopped there and tore it out. He

rewrote that page, and in a short while the story appeared. At last Victor Lockland's feet were on the ladder of success."

I could hardly believe what I had heard. Time and time again I had read of the magic of American success—but this was indeed a wonder-story. "Rewrote the page," I faltered. "How?"

"At the top of the page there was a big drawing showing a lot of college lads having a joyous time with a large cake from home," Michael explained. "One of the boys said: '*Mother baked this cake.*'"

"Now, there was the idea. I told Victor Lockland to write a story about a college boy getting a cake from home, and inviting his friends in. He was to say—in the story—loud and clearly: *Mother baked this cake.* One of his friends, moved by Mother's generosity, wrote and thanked her for the treat, and told her that all the boys said it was the best cake they had ever tasted.

"It turned out that Mother hadn't baked it, after all. It had been baked by a girl visiting at the house. This girl responded, and there was a charming flirtation by mail. Then she came down to the college prom, and the young man and she fell in love with each other. Of course, the girl was none other than the daughter of John W. Totten, the super-millionaire. So they married, and the young man inherited the factory, and became a wealthy man. It's a story of inspiration and achievement. Of course, there was a villain in it, too.

"The story was called: *The Girl Behind the Cake.*"

"I remember reading that story," I said. "*Well, well!*"

"But wait," Michael continued. "That's not all. *The*

motion picture people sought out Victor Lockland, and the screen royalties ran into five figures."

"Goodness gracious. Think of *that!*" I exclaimed.

"But wait," Michael continued. "That's not all. After it had run on the films about a year, somebody told the manufacturers of the shredded cocoanut about it, and they sent their advertising man at once to see Victor Lockland. They paid him a good round sum for the right to reprint it in booklet form. Five millions of the booklets were printed—they were beautiful, too, I can tell you—and the advertising manager wrote an introduction that was a peach. He said this idyllic bit of romance, considered by many competent reviewers to be the sweetest story ever told, had been inspired by one of the company's advertisements. He didn't say anything about me in his introduction. It was pretty long as it was—in fact, it was longer than the story—and I suppose he had to leave out something."

"Well, sir, that's a remarkable——"

"But *wait*," Michael commented. "That's not all. Lockland then began to use the same idea over and over, putting it in different surroundings, so you'd hardly recognize it—always a story with a girl behind the scenes; a girl to be won——"

"Is that all?" I asked, rather timidly.

"Yes, that's all," he answered.

"Well, I was just going to say that Victor Lockland is a big name in literature."

"You bet he is," Michael agreed. "And that's how he got his start. He's made a fortune."

"I suppose you and he are great friends."

"Oh, no. He hardly knows me now," Michael replied.

"He has become a literary oracle. He speaks only to God, and is kind of snappish with Him." . . .

3

"What kind of book are you going to write?" Michael asked, after a short pause.

"It's going to be fiction. A novel. I want you to be the hero."

"That so? Good!" he exclaimed. "That's my dish. Being a hero. I'm a good triangulation man, too."

"What's that?" I demanded. "Triangulation man? Is that something in a book?"

"Well, I should say it is. The eternal triangle? You know what that is, don't you? It's the subject of most novels. While I was knocking around England I worked on a couple of eternal triangles for H. G. Wells. He said I was the best character he had ever employed in triangular work—and, by George, he ought to know."

I thought I might as well get a possible misapprehension cleared up at once, so I said, "There won't be any triangle in my novel, Michael. The book is going to be on a plane far above any such philandering. I'm writing for the intellectual *élite*."

"Lord save us!" he almost shouted. "So I'm to be a high-brow hero! I never counted on a fate like this."

"Oh, get out," I objected. "Don't put on airs. You know it doesn't make any difference to you."

"It doesn't—you think," he said, rather bitterly. "That's a regular author's idea. They all say that. Well, you just ought to hear what characters think of that top-lofty way

of doing things. Some of the sharpest discussions at the Characters Club have been on that subject. Is the book to be conservative or liberal?"

"I think we'd better make it liberal," I replied. What the great author had said to me in Chapter One came back to me vividly. "Put just a touch of liberal, progressive thought in the novel, Michael. Keep it out of the reactionary class."

"All right, I'll keep my part of it from becoming reactionary," Michael promised heartily, "if you'll look out for the rest. What's the story?"

"I don't know." . . . I was really perplexed. The truth is that I did not have the slightest idea how to go about developing a plot. "I haven't thought of a story. It occurred to me that you and I might work out one together."

"Well, we can talk about it at luncheon," Michael remarked. "Suppose we go over to Henri's on Forty-sixth Street, and have a bite to eat and discuss the whole thing."

Chapter Five

The Characters Club

I

DOWNSTAIRS Henri's is a pastry shop; upstairs it is a restaurant with a faint flavor of Paris. There is aspiration in the air; the place aspires to be a replica of Marguery's on the Boulevard de Bonne-Nouvelle. Why it falls short in this praiseworthy effort, I don't know. Perhaps because of the prevailing national aridity.

"Tell me about the Characters Club, Michael," I said when the waiter had departed with an order. "I heard you speak of it just now."

"Oh, it's just a club," he replied. "Like any other club, except there seems to be more arguments and bad temper. Characters are sometimes so cranky, you know—and then we have lots of mean, rascally fellows among them."

"Do you keep such unpleasant characters in the club? Haven't you any rules?"

"Oh, sure—we have rules," he answered, "and when a member is posted on the board three times as an unpleasant character, he's expelled. There's a lot of latitude about it, though. A character's got to be pretty confounded unpleasant before he's posted. Their authors get 'em into trouble by forcing them to do things that a gentleman ought not to be made to do.

"The board of governors had to expel a member not so very long ago. An old fraud called Captain Peter Fitzurse. He was such a braggart that nobody could endure him."

"Well, there are a lot of braggarts about," I remarked. "If you begin throwing out braggarts you'll have your hands full."

"Yes," he continued. "That's so—but this old Captain Fitzurse carries a sword cane, and if you don't admire him he draws it on you. . . . He blames his author for his troubles."

"Who's his author?"

"His author is named Donald Peabody Marquis. You may know him—a fat fellow."

"Oh," I said in surprise, "you mean Don Marquis. No, I've never met him. Where d'you get that Donald Peabody stuff? His name is Don."

"Captain Fitzurse says his full name is Donald Peabody Hurlingham Marquis. He says that this Marquis person has ruined his reputation."

"I thought Don Marquis had made the Captain's reputation," I said.

"No—just the reverse. So he says."

An author has grave responsibilities, it appears. Fancy having a herd of irate characters at your heels!

"We have some great arguments at the Characters Club," Michael continued. "The other evening there was a regular debate over the relative value of plot compared to character work in the modern novel. It was a pretty hot argument for awhile."

"Sherlock Holmes contended that the plot was the real thing in any work of fiction. They gave him the laugh."

Nearly everybody disagreed with him—still, he's a pretty good debater."

I could appreciate the Sherlock Holmes point of view, and said so. His own experience, of course. But, after all, it was a narrow way to look at the question. A detective yarn is not everything.

"Some of the fellows got a little excited about it. They thought Sherlock's argument had a shade of disloyalty in it—a character himself, you see, and belittling the work of characters generally. Still, I think he had a right to——"

"What do you think about it yourself?"

"Oh, I took the side of the characters," he replied. I was pleased to hear that, for our novel will involve a lot of character work.

2

The waiter placed a dish of sole meuniere on the table. "Better try some of this fish, Michael," I suggested.

He did not pay much attention to the food. "There are only two subjects on which it is possible to write a novel," he asserted. "One is the job and the other is sex. Human life manifests itself only in those two directions."

"Economics and love, eh? How about a philosophical novel—an intellectual story, without either money or love, in which the interest is carried on by the interplay of abstract ideas?"

He leaned back in his chair and gazed thoughtfully around the room. "The intellectual novel is simply a philosophical essay, related by characters. It is the outstanding vice of French novelists, though we see very little of it

here. People don't live philosophical lives. Philosophy and culture—these are tacked on to life, like the modern conveniences in a house. You can take them or leave them alone.

"I believe," he went on, "that all immense and striking achievement of any kind is associated with—and is probably due to a thwarting or twisting of the sex impulse. . . . Normal people never accomplish great things. Sex sends men and women careering and shouting through the world just as it sends an animal bellowing and growling through the jungle. All the great creative work of the world has been done by neurotics . . . in whom the sex impulse has been transformed into a sort of energy that is not precisely intellectual, or spiritual—an energy that really has no name."

"Well, there's Sir Isaac Newton," I ventured. "He had no sex life at all, and he certainly possessed a creative genius of the highest order."

"He was indeed a great creator," Michael asserted, "but I don't agree with you that he had no sex life. He did have—a most abnormal one. He wrote, in his later years, that he had never made love to a woman in his life. You'll grant that is abnormal. He was a neurotic and had religious hallucinations. I think it rather interesting that both Shakespeare and Molière were unhappily married; that Abraham Lincoln lived with an indifferent wife and loved another woman at a distance; that Napoleon had no more morals than a back-fence cat; that George Sand——"

"I hope you're not leading up to the point that I ought to write a novel about free-love. If you are, I can tell you right now that I am not going to do it."

Michael looked surprised. "Why, I wasn't thinking of your novel at all," he said. "I was about to make the point that the normal person is neither a free-lover nor an ascetic, while all great creative achievements are almost invariably the work of people who are either one or the other—if not in physical actuality, they are, at least, in spirit."

"We'll let it go at that," I said. "We want to be frank, and human, and all that sort of thing, in the book; but this stark, morbid Russian atmosphere—we've got to keep it out." I was beginning to fear that Michael had lived too long abroad to be entirely at home in an American frame.

"I get you," he said, "and I'll obey instructions. You want the novel to be human, but not too damned human."

3

"Speaking of Russians," he remarked, as he poured the coffee, "we have a devil of a time with them at the Characters Club. Those in the Dostoievsky outfit are a sight. Now and then they try to kill themselves. All of them are saturated with the spirit of self-abnegation, though they do eat huge meals."

"I can imagine. . . . The Characters Club must be an interesting place."

"It is," he continued, "in a way—it is. I'd like it better if there were not so many incurable grouches around. Somebody whining all the time. I wish we had more like Abbé Jerome Coignard—that little French priest from the *Rotisserie de la Reine Pedauque*. Good-natured—he has twinkling humorous eyes—and tells a lot of funny little

stories about people—some of them not so puritanical, either. Monsier l'Abbé doesn't mind prohibition at all; he eats his dinner at a table in the garden and raises his demitasse with a graceful gesture. 'My imagination serves me,' he says; 'here I have in this cup the red wine of the valley of the Rhone.'

"Who are some of the grouches?" I asked.

"Well, now, there's Lee Randon. I like Lee, but he does make his own life rather miserable. You know he's the fellow who played with a doll in Hergesheimer's novel *Cytherea*. He says he was not treated right. Just to listen to him pan Hergesheimer is a liberal education in criticism. Oh, he's sore. The other evening he was at it in full swing—Hergesheimer this and Hergesheimer that—when Felix Fay, from *Moon-Calf*, was trying to read his newspaper. 'Oh, let up on the poor crab,' Felix said; 'he put you in a good book and in good company.' . . . Lee stopped a minute, seemed surprised, and then he said, 'That's not what I'm complaining about. He tried to break up my home, and almost did it, too.'"

"If you want my opinion," I said at this point, "I don't think either of them showed much respect for Mr. Hergesheimer." I wanted this criticism of authors stopped. Writing men must stick together.

"Well, Lee wouldn't have said it if he hadn't been half gone in liquor," Michael conceded. "He drinks like a fish. One of the most amusing characters around the club is a Conrad sea captain, a hearty old salt. He's so muddled that he can't find the door to the street sometimes; and likely as not he starts to read the newspaper holding it upside down."

"The other day I heard William J. Burns say to him—Burns, being a detective, is always looking into things—I heard Burns say to this Conrad sea captain——"

"Hold on a minute," I exclaimed. "You must be mistaken there, Michael. Mr. William J. Burns is not a character in fiction."

"But he is," Michael insisted. "I know him—he's a member of the club."

"Get out! Somebody's been stringing you. Burns is head of the Bureau of Investigation of the Department of Justice."

"That's right," Michael spoke as if he knew what he was talking about. "The same Burns. He's entirely fictional . . . you ought to hear him tell how he ran down the Red Socialist who caused the Wall Street explosion a few years ago."

"I thought that mystery had never been solved."

"Oh, yes, it was solved. Burns and his men ran down the perpetrator—at Government expense, naturally. A Red Socialist. They got him in Poland, or Germany—I forget which. He confessed, too. He was known locally at home as Larry the Liar. . . . He confessed to the whole thing, the only weak spot in his confession being that he thought Wall Street was on the Harlem River. . . . I've heard that Burns got more than twelve hundred pages of favorable publicity on that story. . . . Oh, yes, you're all off about Burns. He's entirely fictional."

Like a flash of light the thought came into my head that here was the solution of the tantalizing Burns mystery which had vexed the American people so long. Men have argued themselves hoarse about it. Some have claimed that

there is no Burns, that he is merely a trade-mark; others have endeavored to prove that Burns is not one person, but many; in fact, a syndicate composed of bunk-shooters. Neither view is correct; he is a character in fiction. . . .

"Oh, I see . . . and what did Burns say to the Conrad sea captain? I interrupted your story."

"One day," he resumed, "Burns saw the old salt fiddling around in his confused way, and Burns—he said, 'What's the matter with you, Captain? You seem kind of dazed. Too much hooch?'"

"'No, it ain't hooch,' the Captain said. He speaks slowly—laboriously. 'It's Conrad. You know, my boy'—he went on—'before I met Conrad I'd never had a doubt about anything in all my life. Now I'm just a mess of doubts, misgivings, hesitations, moral fears, adumbrations of soul, and God knows what. I can't even read my chart any more. I don't know whether this is Wednesday or a spring day in 1887. Why, Conrad fixed it so once that I got wrapped up in abstraction, or something—I don't remember what he called it—over a gorgeous purple and gold tropical sunset, and like a silly ass I ran the old hooker on a reef. What d'you think of that? All I know now is that an awful fate is hanging over me, so I keep old Uncle Remus bringing me one glass of root sarsaparilla after another.'"

"Uncle Remus!" I was astonished. "Uncle Remus of Joel Chandler Harris? Don't you draw the color line?"

"Oh, no," Michael said. "No color line among the characters. Poor old Uncle Remus—he insists on waiting on the table, but after dinner he comes in and sits by the fire in a kind of dreamy doze. . . ."

"Some of them around that Club are most improbable creatures—pitiful, too. Come from fourth-rate novels, you understand. They're mere shadows—you can look right through them. Walk through them, too, like walking through a sort of mist. Others are nothing but sticks, no more expression on their faces than there is on that wall. . . . Old Colonel Newcome—do you know the old white-haired Colonel?"

I nodded. "You mean the Colonel Newcome from Thackeray's novel? Certainly, I've read 'The Newcomes.'"

"A gentle soul," Michael said. "He's terrible, though, when he once loses his temper. One afternoon, when about twenty of these dull shadows and sticks were sitting around—some of them didn't even have enough vitality to look over the magazines or play solitaire—the Colonel lost his temper. He went raging around that Club with his newspaper in one hand and his spectacles in the other. He said it was a confounded shame that authors were allowed to send such pathetic creatures out into the world. There ought to be a law against it, he said; somebody ought to ask a question about it in the House of Commons."

"You might tell him, Michael," I said, "that a literary apprenticeship law is now being prepared, and will soon be in force. It will obviate all such immature work. It has been favorably reported by the Senate Committee on Literature. Under its provisions an apprenticeship of seven years will be required under such masters as George Moore or Zane Grey before an author is allowed to write. He must have his papers as a journeyman novelist first; and there is to be a severe punishment for any jackleg amateur who sets pen to paper without a certificate. That's why I

am hurrying up with my novel. I want to get it done before the law goes into effect."

4

(I mean it, too. It's too late in life for me to start in on a seven-years' apprenticeship, yet this barren lack of advantages may in itself be used later on. Let us suppose that my sixth novel has just been published. This is somewhat in the future, of course. My fifth has sold to the extent of five hundred and eighty thousand copies, and the sixth starts off with an unprecedented demand. When the literary editors crowd around and ask, "How the devil did you do it?" then I can truthfully say—and with legitimate pride—"Gentlemen, I was only a poor boy with no capital but a pair of socks and a headache. I had no training—no experience in the novel-writing industry. That was before our admirable literary apprenticeship law had been put into effect by Congress. I was pretty raw in those days, I'll admit, but nevertheless I had resolved to write. In very truth, I had to write, for there was something within me—call it what you will—that flickered and flickered. The cosmic urge——")

5

"Well, how about the story?" Michael asked.

"What story?"

"The story of your novel. Haven't you got it worked out yet?"

No; I didn't have it worked out. I had thought of a Wall Street novel. I have some experience there, and could

write without hearsay or surmise. No, that wouldn't do. . . . It would sound too improbable.

How about a story with our janitor as the hero? A novel of primitive life—of the Old Stone Age, put in a New York setting. A romance of the lowly. I saw myself, in fancy, as the Balzac of the common herd. So I cultivated the janitor for a week. A *conversazione* punctuated with tips. I listened and listened—and then I gave it up. His talk was of woe, of personalities that failed to come up to reasonable expectations, of the decay of human hopes. In a general sense he thought the ills of humanity came from the radicals and prohibitionists—"the dirty, dirty scum"—he called them. Then, besides that, there were certain parties residing in the house who had their pockets lined with fish-hooks. Just fancy! I told him there were no fish-hooks in my pocket, and he said he knew it and that if all fine gentlemen were like me the world would be happier. I agreed with him there, and he passed the liquor. . . . This rough and simple man had an instinctive gesture of infinite courtesy. Before handing over the bottle he always wiped off its mouth on his coat sleeve. The gesture was noble, but the liquor was poor.

These visions, mistaken starts and fruitless efforts passed through my mind as I sat talking with Michael Webb. Then the thought grew within me that I might as well have Michael do some thinking.

"No. I haven't shaped up a story yet," I said to him. "I think you might help me devise a plot."

He shook his head. "I don't believe in cut-and-dried plots," he asserted.

"Why not?"

"Oh, they're a dreadful nuisance because they don't allow any leeway. Nearly every character I've met is opposed to them."

"All right," I said, and I really felt relieved. The responsibility for carrying out a plot rather appalled me. "What do you propose, then?"

"My idea," he said, "would be—if you ask me—to get a group of people together and let nature take its course. There are stories everywhere."

"That would suit me," I agreed, "but I haven't any people. You're the only character I've got."

"Oh, there's no trouble about that." He brushed my objection aside. "There are seven million human beings within twenty miles of this room. I can walk out of here and start a novel in five minutes. . . . But that wouldn't do. We've got to select our locality."

"Precisely," I said. "We must get interesting people and important ones, so what they say will mean something."

Michael leaned back and blew smoke rings musingly at the ceiling. "I've got an idea," he said. "Do you happen to know Richard Ellerman, the motor car magnate?"

"No, I don't know him. I know *of* him, naturally, like everybody else in the United States."

"Well, he lives at Dobbs Ferry," Michael went on. "I know him, and his son is an intimate friend of mine. For the last six months he's been trying to get me to take a vacation and spend it at their estate at Dobbs Ferry. They call their place Shadow Lawn. It seems to me that we'd be as likely to run across a novel there as anywhere else."

Dobbs Ferry is a suburb of New York City, about twenty miles up the Hudson. There is a quiet, old-world

charm about the place. A village consisting of one winding street of shops, a fringe of suburban villas, and beyond them a county map of magnificent country estates.

I thought over this suggestion carefully. My reflection was of little use, for I was dealing with matters in which I had no experience. It would do no harm to take a chance. "Very well," I said. "That suits me. I suppose your idea is that I'll give up all thought about the plot, and just write down whatever happens."

"Yes. That's the idea. We begin with the Ellermans. Do you know much about them?"

"No, I don't," I answered. "Hardly anything. He's the big automobile man. I know that."

"Then I'd better tell you something about them, so you'll understand the lay-out of the situation.

"Richard Ellerman is worth at least sixty million dollars. In describing him, I say that first, for that's the principal thing about him. Sixty million dollars! It's a lot of money. In personal appearance, he's a large man—too stout, though—with a heavy face, a strong chin, slightly gray hair, a tired look about his eyes——"

"I know," I said. "I've seen his picture. What about the inside of him? What does he think about?"

"About money and power," Michael replied. "He's an able man. Able . . . able."

"Able in what way?" I asked. "Has he any ability outside of money-getting?"

"No, and he doesn't need any other ability," Michael said, and looked over at me with an air of cool surprise. "His ability lies in a thorough understanding of the modern world. He's short-sighted and acquisitive, and thinks in

short, straight, direct lines. These are the necessary qualities. He's not bad company—rather silent, though he has a good sense of humor."

"Does he like you?"

"W-e-ll, yes—in a way," Michael replied. "He likes people who amuse him. He doesn't attach any importance to my ideas. Without power or money accompanying them, ideas mean very little to him. The mere fact that I haven't made a fortune myself proves to Richard Ellerman that I am an ineffectual person. It has never occurred to him—and he couldn't possibly believe—that I haven't ever wanted to make money. So we get along together very well."

"I'm glad of that," I said. "I'd hate to have you go up to Dobbs Ferry, and have an unpleasant time of it."

"Don't worry," he laughed. "I'll have a lot of fun. . . . Now, let me tell you about Blanche. That's Richard Ellerman's second wife. She was formerly Blanche Rayner, the celebrated musical comedy star. She's much younger than her husband. He married her about ten years ago."

"I've seen her on the stage. It seems long ago. She was Blanche Rayner then," I remarked.

"His manner of courting and marrying her was very amusing," Michael said. "One evening he went to the theatre and saw her for the first time. Next day he bought the theatre—I mean bought the building, company, play, everything—and took her to dinner that evening. . . .

"Next day he sent her sixty thousand dollars worth of pearls and a limousine, and she was so elated and excited that she could hardly go through with the play. About three days later he appeared at her apartment at ten in the morning, had her maid yank her out of bed and dress her

and told her that he had come to marry her. She married him at once—and that's that."

"He makes his money talk," I remarked.

"He makes it shout—on occasion," Michael added.

"A sort of twentieth century cave man," I commented.

"I suppose you might call him that. . . . I know Richard Ellerman, Jr., much better than I know his father or step-mother. He is generally called Bingo Ellerman—you may have heard of him——"

"I should say I have," I broke in. "Bingo Ellerman. Why, he's in the newspapers every month or so. For Heaven's sake, is that the kind of people you have for your associates?"

"Yes, he's all right. You don't know him. I do."

"He's called the Chorus Ladies' Pension Fund by the newspapers," I said. "He's——"

"He is, too," Michael remarked. "That describes him. What's wrong with being a pension fund if you have the money and the inclination?"

"Nothing," I said. "It's all right."

"Well, Bingo's mother left him her entire fortune in trust when she died," he resumed. "He's twenty-eight, and his income is three hundred thousand dollars a year. He lives at the Olympia Hotel—that apartment hotel up on Broadway around Seventy-second Street.

"Now there you are. My plan is to drop in on Bingo to-morrow morning and accept his invitation to go to Dobbs Ferry. He never has anything to do, so I have no doubt he'll be ready to run up there with me, and——"

"And then we'll let nature take its course," I said. "All right. That sounds good."

"There's one thing I want you to do as a favor to me," he remarked.

"All right, Michael," I asserted. "Any little thing I can do——"

"I want you to stay out of the story yourself," he said. "Perhaps I'm wrong, but I have the impression that you're going to put yourself on every page, and interfere with the natural course of events. . . . It won't do. Do you recall Flaubert's dictum?"

"No, I don't recall Flaubert's dictum," I replied, inwardly a little ashamed of my ignorance. "You see—I'm not a regular literary man."

Michael brushed aside my remark. "Well, that makes no difference," he said. "Flaubert's dictum is, '*L'artiste ne doit pas plus apparaître dans son oeuvre que le Dieu dans la nature.*'"

"But God appears everywhere in nature," I exclaimed.

"Yes, I know that," he agreed, "but God keeps pretty quiet about it. He doesn't go around interfering with people all the time, and you can't produce a literary work if you continue to monkey with the characters. Think of that unfortunate sea captain at the club."

"Very well," I agreed. "I'll stay out of it."

Chapter Six

The Ogre of the Bedtime Stories

I

THE door of an apartment on the third floor of the Olympia opened an inch when Michael Webb rang the bell, and an eye, jet-black in color and cold in expression, and apparently not connected with a human body, peered an instant through the crack. Michael was about to speak when the disembodied eye suddenly vanished and the door snapped shut.

"'Pon my soul," Michael said to himself, "this is like the *Perils of Pauline* in the movies. The next thing I know a trap-door will open at my feet." . . . He looked around the wide, luxurious hall with its blue-gold carpet and its stiff settees upholstered in brocade, and wondered whether it would be better to sit down and wait, or try ringing the bell again. While he was still undecided the door opened to the width of a tiny slit, and this time a cheerful blue eye swam into his ken. An instant later he found himself inside, his shoulders smarting from a terrific slap on the back.

"Hello, Mike, how's the boy?" cried the owner of the blue eye, a blonde giant in pajamas with a startling design of sunflowers on them.

"Oh, I'm all right," Michael answered, "what's the idea of the pass-word stuff?"

"I thought you might be a newspaper reporter. The lobby downstairs is full of 'em. That's the reason of the military precautions and the faithful Matsu as guard of the outer wall——"

"I sent up my name, Bingo—the girl downstairs in the office telephoned it as I came up in the elevator."

"Yeh, I know, but I thought maybe one of those gumshoe artists had sneaked up with you. Sit down"—Bingo waved a friendly hand toward an armchair while he crawled back in bed—"have some breakfast. No? Well, have a drink—have a cigarette—have the morning paper—have anything there is in sight. Glad to see you."

Michael lifted an evening dress shirt and a pair of pumps out of the armchair and sat down. "What's the trouble with the newspapers now?"

"Hah!" Bingo waved his hand with a gesture of depreciation. "I'm in again. Some girl—I hardly know her—comes bravely to the front with a breach-of-promise case. Cross my heart I'm not guilty"—suing the action to the word, he solemnly made a cross with his forefinger over the sun-flower on his left breast—"and it's just a hold-up."

"Then let her do her worst," Michael suggested. "If she has nothing on you, it will be easy to beat the case in court."

"You think so, eh?" Bingo looked as cynical as his laughing blue eyes and boyish features would permit him. "You're a great philosopher, Michael my lad, but you don't know juries. I've already had two breach-of-promise cases before this, and I swear to God I'll never ask another girl to marry me. If any marriageable woman ever refers to

the subject in conversation with me I'll run like a rabbit. I'm a dyed-in-the-wool anti-marrier."

He slid out of bed and started for the bathroom.

"Well, why not buy this girl off?" Michael asked. "That would seem to me the simplest way of getting rid of her."

"Of course. You hit it the first guess. That's what we're going to do. My learned counsel, Mr. Caswell—of Caswell, Ripley, Hunt, Moore and Mastin—is going to do that very thing at noon to-day in his office. She demands a hundred thousand dollars; we'll offer her ten—and raise it to twenty. It's sorter like a poker game, you know. Caswell says her lawyer is a hold-up artist who usually gets ten thousand per hold-up—and the girl will get ten—so there you are."

"That sounds easy," Michael remarked.

"But the newspapers," Bingo complained. "What about those fellows downstairs? If I don't see 'em they'll write something anyway. And if I do see 'em they'll write even more."

Bingo Ellerman had been high-grade raw material for the newspapers for ten years. They considered him an unfailing resource in times of scarcity. "I don't care about myself," he continued. "The folks at Dobbs Ferry—you see, it gets 'em in bad. My stepmother especially. She's a good soul, with a whale of a social ambition, while I'm the kid who put hairs in the butter. I don't know whether you've ever found it out yet, but you got to think about other people a bit. A guy can't go around thinking about himself all the time. It isn't right. If a lot of stuff gets in the newspapers about this mess, it'll make 'em feel awfully bad at Dobbs Ferry——"

"You go on and take your bath and let me put my mind on it awhile," Michael said. "I'll see what——"

"That's right," Bingo said with enthusiasm. "Put the old brain to work. You'll see a way out." He went in the bathroom, whistling. Then came the sound of running water, and a moment later he thrust his lathered face around the edge of the door and called out: "Say, Mike. I'm glad you dropped in just now. I need you to hold my hand. Are you thinking of a way to get rid of the reporters, and keep it out of the newspapers?"

"Sure thing. I've already thought of a way," Michael called back. "Get through there, and I'll tell you."

2

Bingo's college career had fortunately come to an end in the last month of his sophomore year. "I was darned lucky the thing happened when it did," he said with unquenchable optimism. "Everybody says the last two years are the hardest."

It happened this way: Bingo conceived the idea of hiring a hearse. That's a natural thing for a young man with unlimited money to do, and there is really nothing wrong in it, except to a mind perverted by conventionalism. Hearses are for hire, and money is made to spend. Combine the two ideas, and you hire a hearse. What of it?

Bingo not only hired a hearse, but he also rented a coffin for the day. Then he put himself in the coffin, and had the hearse, with the coffin in it, driven round the city. Fifteen or twenty of his college friends, with bands of crape on their arms, plodded in a melancholy file after

the hearse. The traffic policemen made way for the procession and people stood in reverent silence.

The cortege finally drew up before a saloon, and the pall-bearers gently lifted the coffin and carried it inside. One of the students pinned a black-lettered placard on the hearse. It read:

.
 . STICK AROUND. THE STIFF .
 . WILL SOON BE BACK. HE .
 . HAS GONE IN THE BAR FOR .
 . A DRINK .

At the third bar the gathering was so large that the street-cars had definitely suspended operations, the police reserves were gnawing away at the edge of the crowd, and there was a report in circulation that no less a person than William Jennings Bryan had been found drunk in the saloon.

Now we see a spare, frock-coated, middle-aged figure pushing its way through the throng. Destiny is delivering the goods, as usual. The gentleman with the frock-coat and gray side-whiskers, swimming through the shoals of people, is the president of the university, out for his Saturday morning stroll and his weekly contact with the masses in their daily life. Eaten to the bone by curiosity, he arrives at the saloon door just as the sorrowful pall-bearers bore their confined companion back to the hearse.

So Bingo's chance of wearing academic laurels perished miserably. . . . His friends did what they could to save him. That the president of the university himself was

the author of "An Appreciation of the Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe" was pointed out to the authorities, but they said this had nothing to do with the case.

It was about this time that Bingo's intimate relations with the newspapers began. They usually printed the stories of his achievements on the first page; and occasionally a weepy editorial was devoted to him.

Outside of the ordinary run of automobile smash-ups and spectacular race-track losses and winnings, his troubles arose mainly from his instant willingness to marry almost anyone.

At the age of twenty-eight he had acquired such renown that he had become the ogre of the bedtime stories of all virgins from Boston to Pittsburgh.

His latest affair—not the one the reporters were investigating, but the one before that—was enormously complicated in detail, but in its larger outlines it appears that he was engaged to a manicure lady, and during the term of his engagement he attended a football game where he met another lady and, carried away by enthusiasm, married her the same day.

These facts having come to light, the jilted manicure girl sued him for breach of promise; and he set out to get an annulment of his marriage from the other lady, the contention of his counsel being that their client had been drunk when she roped him in.

In the course of these proceedings his letters to the manicure girl were read in court. While this was going on the theaters of New York City reported the lowest week's business in their history. People claimed that the newspapers furnished all the entertainment anybody ought

to have . . . This poem, written by Bingo to his lady love, was part of the week's programme:

"Gee, I was rotten, my darling,
When I think of the things I've done
My heart turns to ice within me,
And I feel like a wretched Hun.
But when you left me to-day, dear,
A promise was born in my brain,
For I vowed that I'd live as you'd have me live
When you took that Grand Central train."

People in country clubs and in lordly houses in New York City and Westchester county repeated softly to each other,

"Gee, I was rotten, my darling,"

whenever any of the Ellermans came in sight. The phrase, "I feel like a wretched Hun," has been adopted into the classic slang of the golf course.

3

Among well-informed people, not only in New York City, but throughout the great republic, the friendship of the celebrated philosopher, Michael Webb, for Bingo Ellerman was the subject of acid comment. Imagine Herbert Spencer arm-in-arm with Tittlebat Titmouse! Some people contended that Michael Webb had softening of the brain; others said hardening of the arteries and premature senility.

"Bingo Ellerman is not perfect," Michael Webb admitted, "but who is? He's almost perfect, and one oughtn't to expect any more. My analysis shows less than one-half of

one per cent of bunk—the lowest percentage I've ever found in any person.

“He's frankly immoral. Lots of people are immoral, but they're not candid. He's immoral, and glad of it, will tell anybody so, and expects to continue being immoral as long as life and limb hold out.

“He's entirely worthless as an industrial asset, and refuses to be considered a chip of the old block. He won't take a desk at the plant even as a matter of form. He never intends to do a day's work as long as he lives. And why should he? What could be more absurd than a man with an income of a thousand dollars a day pretending to interest himself in a job when the whole world of fun is open before him?

“People admire tenacity of purpose. He has it. He is criticism-proof, and holds to his course regardless of entreaties and prayers. History tells us that this sort of determination has made empires. Then, why condemn it in Bingo Ellerman?

“I consider him a born success. How few men, even the ablest, even those who have had the advantage of being raised in a log cabin—how few men ever earn even thirty thousand dollars a year. Well, he gets ten times thirty without doing a stroke of work. If that isn't success, then I must say I don't know what you mean by the word.”

“But, listen to reason, Michael,” I pleaded. “His money was left to him. That's not true success—the product of ability and hard work. Now, his father is a great business man. He made his own money. But Richard Junior didn't make his; others made it for him.”

Michael did not agree with me. “The idea is essentially

the same in both cases," he argued. "You say Bingo's father made his own money. How about the sixteen thousand men at work at the Ellerman company's plant? They made Richard Ellerman's fortune. *Of course*. There isn't even an argument in this. How about the salesmen all over the country selling Ellerman cars? How about the clever advertising? Richard Ellerman couldn't even time the piston-stroke of a motor car if he worked at it a month, to say nothing of building a car. He never sold a car personally in his life, never wrote a line of advertising."

"But he's *managed* the business from the start; built it up——"

"Get out," Michael snapped back, "the business of production is managed by the foremen and superintendents, and the business of selling is managed by the sales managers. Richard Ellerman simply performed a little sleight of hand, and when he got these men on the stage instead of making them do tricks he set them to work to earn sixty million dollars for him—and they did. I'm not finding any fault with that; it's not an unusual procedure—but when you say that my friend Bingo is not a real success, I deny your imputation. In a certain sense he's even a bigger success than his father."

"How's that?"

"Well, before the American people would turn over houses and lands and bonds, and so on, to old Richard Ellerman he had to think up a lot of schemes and do a good deal of worrying. The American people are a stubborn, hard-headed crowd, and they've got to be sure they're right before they give a fortune to a man. But in Bingo's case they thought so highly of him that they turned over a thousand

dollars a day to him without question. He didn't even have to ask for it. So this knocking is all done in a spirit of envy, and reflects on the knockers," he concluded bitterly.

The reader must not be carried away by Michael's quixotic argument. I was not impressed by it at all, and I am giving it here only to show the character of Michael Webb's curious mind.

4

"Well, what about it, Mike—old top?" said the clean-shaven, clear-eyed Bingo, as he sat down to the breakfast which the white-jacketed Japanese had just brought in. "How're we going to keep it all out of the papers?"—he lifted the cover off the fried eggs—"you are sure you don't want any breakfast? No? That's the question of the hour—how are we going to keep the jolly old newspapers off my chest?"

"Oh, it's simple," Michael replied.

"That's right. That's the way I like to hear you talk," Bingo said encouragingly, "you know, it's a great thing to be able to look on the sunny side of life. If I should let my troubles get the best of me I'd fall down dead right here"—his mouth was full of toast and egg, and he could hardly talk—"Well, what's the solution?"

"I'll show you," Michael said. "The solution is money. It will accomplish anything."

Bingo in his excitement, forgot his manners and waved his fork with a piece of ham on it, in Michael's face. "No, no, no," he exclaimed. "If you've got an idea of bribing these reporters to keep it out of the papers, just forget it

quick. Speak no more. I've tried it in the past. You can't bribe 'em. They listen to you like you were reading the Bible, and you think you've got it all sewed up. Then, in the next edition they give the whole story, including the bribery. No, no."

"Hold on, you silly ass," said Michael. "Do you think I want to bribe the reporters just because I spoke of money?"

"Sure. That's what I thought."

"I didn't mean that at all. Listen: Are you sure your lawyer can settle it for twenty thousand?"

"Yeh. Morally certain. She's got no case. Wants to be bought off, I tell you. . . . And by all that's holy, I wouldn't do it, either, if it were not for the old folks."

"All right. Would you give ten thousand more to keep it out of the papers?"

"I certainly would."

"Then we'll make the lady herself keep it out of the papers. Telephone your lawyer to agree on the twenty thousand, after the usual hemming and hawing. . . . Then, when that's done and settled, just offer her ten thousand more if she'll sign a letter saying that the whole thing was a mistake, that someone persuaded her to bring suit, and that she did not get a cent in settlement."

Bingo laid down his knife and fork and thought a moment. "I don't think she'd do it," he said slowly. "You see, that would make a public liar of her. She'd hate to have that published."

"But your lawyer must tell her that it won't be published—that nobody will ever see the document—unless she gives out a newspaper interview, or talks about the case. In that

case—if she does talk—then you'll publish the letter. She'll agree to that. Her lawyer will be for it, too, because he'll get another slice of cash. It's a hold-up, you say?"

"You bet it is. It's a hold-up all right."

"Well, being a hold-up anyway, you give 'em ten thousand more and the papers will never get a line of it."

"What about the boys downstairs?" Bingo asked. "How shall I talk to them?"

"Leave that to me," Michael replied. "While you're dressing I'll go down, and tell 'em that you'll meet them all at one o'clock at your lawyer's office, and then you may have something to say. Telephone the lawyer that when they come he's to tell them that it's all a mistake, and the girl will be there, too, to confirm it."

"So I'm not to be at Caswell's office at one?" Bingo asked, confused.

"No, of course not. Caswell will give your excuses to your newspaper cronies. At one o'clock you're going to be with me at Dobbs Ferry. I've accepted your long-standing invitation to spend a vacation at the old homestead."

"Good," Bingo said. "I'll have the car brought around and we'll run up there right away. That gets me clean out of it, doesn't it?"

"Precisely."

In half an hour they were on their way to Dobbs Ferry. Bingo laughed and sang as the car raced up the hills, and his troubles were as things that had never been.

Chapter Seven

The Contumely of Ideas

I

THE next morning, about ten o'clock, Michael Webb walked through one of the French windows at Shadow Lawn and stood on the terrace, gazing with beauty-struck eyes at the vast panorama of hills, woods, and river that lay before him. A panorama painted against a milky-blue horizon by some god with a perfect sense of form and color.

The river, in the morning sunlight, was a sheet of liquid silver. Above it rose the dark green hills, their heads wrapped in turbans of cloudy haze—in their granite hearts a memory of the thunders of long ago, when their brothers smote all living things with fire. Dreamy, pensive, inscrutable, like monks with folded hands.

On this May morning the ancient hills flew their flags of emerald with streamers of blue and gray, and the laughter of early summer broke their solemn vigil.

He saw the great, sleepy river drowsing through its glittering valley; the brown and red roofs of the town standing among the trees like ships anchored in a sea of green; and the clinging, white trails of distant roads.

His attention was soon drawn to a slender, well-dressed

young man who sat at the furthest end of the terrace, before a table on which there was a pile of documents. As the young man arranged the papers, putting them neatly in various piles, the quick, nervous motions of his hands and the inclination of his head aroused some answering note in Michael's memory. "I've seen that chap before," he said to himself. His remembrance floated mistily on a sea of impressions and experiences.

The man at the table looked up, gazed at Michael a moment and smiled. "I see you don't recall me, Mr. Webb," he said, as they shook hands. "I'm —"

"Yes, I do," Michael asserted. "You came to see me once about my book, but——"

"I'm Hunter, of the Ellerman Company. Thomas Houghton Hunter. I was one of the organizers of the Chicago Second-Rate Club. One day when I was in New York I ran in to make your acquaintance, and pay my respects."

"I remember that occasion very well," Michael said cordially. "I'm glad to see you again, Mr. Hunter, and—surprised. Are you located in New York now?"

Hunter smiled and shook his head. "No," he replied. "I am still at the Chicago office—I'm a vice-president of the company, you know—but I've come on here with a proposition that I want to put up to Mr. Ellerman. A plan I'm trying to get the company to adopt." He nodded at the pile of typewritten papers on the table.

"Quite a proposition, I should say," Michael remarked, "judging from the amount of reading matter that goes with it."

"It's a big thing," said Hunter gravely. "A big thing.

I'll tell you the idea. You know what an automobile battery is?"

"Certainly. You may not know it, but you're talking to an old automobile mechanic. I'd know a starting and lighting battery in the dark."

"Yes?" Hunter continued. "Well, the automobile manufacturer buys his batteries under contract from the battery manufacturer. My proposition is for our company to make its own batteries. Why shouldn't we? We turn out two hundred and fifty thousand Ellerman cars a year. That would keep a big battery plant busy."

"That sounds reasonable," Michael commented. "Is that all there is to it? Why do you need so many papers to put that idea up to Mr. Ellerman?"

"Well, there's a good deal more to it," Hunter continued. "You see, the battery people sell us their batteries at less than the actual cost of production so they can get their make of batteries on our cars. Now, an Ellerman car's life is twice as long as the life of a battery, so when the battery wears out, why Mr. Battery Maker sells a new battery to Mr. Car Owner and charges him a good stiff price for it—and there's where the profit comes in."

"I see," Michael said. "Your idea is, I presume, that the Ellerman Company will sell these renewal batteries to Ellerman car owners and make that profit for itself?"

"Yes, that's the idea—but I want to do even more than that. By selling our batteries through our own automobile agencies we can greatly reduce the price of batteries to the public. You see? It will benefit everybody all around. What d'you think of it? I've given you only a bare outline, but——"

"Sure, I get the idea," Michael said. "You would have to build a plant, I suppose?"

"Certainly; a large plant."

"Well, the idea seems sound," Michael said casually, "but if you want my advice I'd make the manufacturing part of it—the plant, you know—sound as simple as possible."

"The plant's an essential feature of my plan. Make batteries ourselves, you see."

Michael shook his head. "Financiers like to make money in direct, simple ways. A plant means machinery wearing out, labor problems, and all that kind of thing. They don't like manufacturing plants."

"Oh, Mr. Ellerman likes plants all right," Hunter argued. "We've got one of the largest in America already."

"It's a necessary evil," Michael continued unconvinced. "You do as you please, of course; you know your own idea, and I don't; but if I were putting it up to him, I'd touch the manufacturing part of it lightly. The profit is the thing."

"And the service to the public," Hunter added.

"N-no. I don't think so. That's not so convincing. Never scatter your fire. Your plan will probably stand or fall on the profit feature, so I'd stick to that, if I were you. He'll think better of you that way."

As Hunter listened he fidgeted nervously with a fountain pen, turning it over and over in his fingers. It was plain that he was on edge, and too anxious.

Then Richard Ellerman came out of the house. A heavy man with graying hair and keen, secretive eyes. "Good-morning," he said pleasantly to both men. "We'll have to put off that round of golf until to-morrow morning," he

remarked casually to Michael. "I forgot all about our young friend here when I agreed to give you a licking." Both he and Michael laughed.

"Oh, all right," Michael said, as he moved away. "You won't have any excuse to-morrow morning."

"You mean you'll have another day for practice," Ellerman said with a cackling laugh. "As for me, I don't need any practice."

He was still chuckling as he sat down at the table opposite Hunter, while Michael Webb strolled away.

"So here you are, eh?" Ellerman remarked, twisting the cord of his eye-glasses mechanically with his fingers. "It's your first visit here, isn't it?"

"Yes, Mr. Ellerman," Hunter replied. "I was admiring the view from the terrace."

"This house is wonderfully situated," Ellerman remarked. "That's why I bought it. This entire Westchester county is full of beautiful scenery. . . . I want you to stay a week, and I'll have someone take you around in one of our cars—you and your wife."

The younger man was immensely flattered, in his heart, at this attention. He had expected to remain only over the week-end.

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Ellerman," he said. "I don't know, though, if I can stay. There are some matters coming up in Chicago."

"Oh, let the work take care of itself for a week," Ellerman interrupted. "Things get done somehow. I've never come across anything in my life that was as important as it appeared to be."

Hunter made no comment on this, and was uncertain as

to whether he ought to begin on his plan or wait until Mr. Ellerman said he was ready.

“And you must see the maze before you go back. By all means. Yes, I want you to see the maze. Remind me of it. Don’t let anybody else take you through it. That’s my little hobby; I always like to show the maze myself.” Richard Ellerman’s habitual look of blank indifference kindled into a faint enthusiasm. As he spoke he kept twirling his eye-glasses on his finger.

“The maze?” said Hunter, a little at sea over what a maze might be. Then he remembered. “Oh, yes. One of those things you get lost in. Well, it must be mighty interesting, Mr. Ellerman. I read about a maze somewhere—in the grounds of some palace in England——”

“Hampton Court Palace, I suppose,” said Richard Ellerman. “I know that maze very well. It doesn’t compare with mine here.”

“I’m wondering how a man as busy as you ever happened to get interested in the subject of mazes,” Hunter remarked, in a tone of admiration. “I see you know all about them.”

“Well, I don’t know; it just happened. My wife—she calls the maze my hobby. That and fine art. I don’t know. Well, sir, a very comical thing happened. A man came here—let’s see—Atterbury—Atherton—no, I think his name was Atterbury—he wrote a book on mazes. He was writing his book at the time. Came here, anyway, and spent the night. Wanted to see the maze. All right. I said, ‘Look here, Mr.—Mr.’—what the devil was the chap’s name—‘all right, Mr. Atterbury, or whatever-his-name-was, I’m going to show you a maze that is a maze.’”

"I'll bet he was astonished," Hunter interrupted, feeling that he was obliged to say something.

"Well, before we went to see it, I called Albert. That's my man who takes care of the maze. He and two helpers. The whole thing's five hundred by three hundred feet, but there's more than five thousand feet of hedge in it—hedge eight feet high, so we need three men working around it all the time."

"I can see it would require a lot of attention," said Hunter.

"It does. Albert—he knows the maze as well as I do—so I sent for him and said, 'Albert, I'm about to lose this fine fellow. Now, if you hear him call out, don't go near him.' Albert said all right; he wouldn't pay any attention.

"Then it was almost dark, and I took Mr. What's-his-name right to the center of the maze, winding and turning. Soon as we got there, while he was making his notes, I slipped away quietly. We waited and waited for dinner. He was lost for fair."

"I'll bet he was."

"Yes, he was in bad. After awhile my wife got impatient; the butler said the dinner was spoiling, so I sent Albert for him. I never saw a man so enthusiastic. . . . He gave the maze a grand write-up. Called it—in his book, you know—the Ellerman type of maze. A very good description. . . . I bought five hundred copies of the book, and sent 'em around to people."

"Say, Mr. Ellerman, that's a darned good story." Hunter smiled and his eyes sparkled. "I can just see that fellow lost and feeling his way around."

He was greatly impressed by Ellerman's friendly atten-

tion. It was a cold-blooded friendliness, which had no roots in his inner life, and he treated everybody the same way. Hunter did not know this; a character of this kind was beyond his comprehension.

Richard Ellerman did not classify people as friends or enemies. Although he used these words, they evoked no luminous sense of reality. Instead of friends or enemies, he mentally classified individuals as adherents or opponents. An adherent was anyone who performed a service for him, or satisfied a desire, or with whom he could make some advantageous arrangement. An opponent was simply a person who opposed his will . . . sometimes, under the stress of circumstances, adherents and opponents changed places; and he thought this was right and proper.

Toward people who did not come within his circle of material interest his characteristic attitude was one of good-natured indifference—an indifference which deepened at one end of the moral spectrum into arrogance and contempt, and lightened at the other end into sensual horse-play and jolly approval.

Hunter was not interested a bit in the maze, and the artificial interest that he had shown was an expression of tact. He could not conceive how any human being could waste time on anything that was of no use except to get lost in. Though he was unable to understand Ellerman's enthusiasm, he was willing to take it at its face value, for great minds—so he thought—have strange turns.

"I see you know Mr. Webb," Ellerman said, changing the subject with characteristic abruptness. "How did you happen to meet him?"

"Why, I read his book, *The Importance of Being Second-*

Rate," Hunter explained, "so one day when I was in New York I ran in to see him. He's a wonderful man."

"Mmph!" was Richard Ellerman's cryptic comment. He considered *The Importance of Being Second-Rate* a piece of literary flub-dub. In his opinion Michael Webb was a clever fellow, an interesting and pleasant companion, but of not much use in the world.

"And after that," Hunter went on, "I was one of the charter members of the Chicago Second-Rate Club—but I resigned when Mr. Webb was forced out."

A shade of contempt came into Ellerman's estimate of Hunter. "Mmph," he said again. "I wonder if he's still keeping up his de-bunking practice?"

"Oh yes," Hunter answered. "You remember the International Development Company? It blew up with a bang last winter. Well, he de-bunked it."

"There's one thing I can say," Ellerman remarked. "There's no bunk about the Ellerman motor car." He laughed lightly.

"I'll say there isn't," Hunter announced in a tone of sincere conviction.

"Well, suppose we get down to whatever you have here for me to consider," Ellerman said, while his gaze wandered gloomily over the pile of pages under Hunter's hand.

2

Thomas Houghton Hunter straightened his tie, shifted his feet, and under the cover of the table he pulled down his white linen cuffs. Then he cleared his throat, sat upright in his chair, and looked around in a manner which he would

have described as a "bearing of confidence and success." He was up to his neck in the One Big Opportunity for which he had waited. He had not only waited for it—he had planned for it. That he was here to-day was the result of a good deal of quiet manipulation on his part.

From the corner of his eye he could see Mrs. Hunter, in her brand new country house frock and wide-brimmed hat, sitting on a marble bench in the pergola. A vivacious middle-aged man was talking to her. Hunter did not know him, for they had arrived at Shadow Lawn only the evening before, and had not met any of the guests—but he saw that Bessie kept glancing at the terrace where he and Ellerman sat. "She's praying for me now," he said to himself, "the good little pal."

There were eleven vice-presidents of the Ellerman Motor Car Company; all of whom, except the first three, were in reality only titled clerks. The company followed the customary plan of conferring titles instead of raises of salary. Thomas Houghton Hunter—he always signed his name with three sonorous words—was the eighth vice-president, and he took his official position seriously.

3

"Mr. Ellerman, the plan I am going to present to you—for your consideration, I mean—I have it all here"—Hunter stammered and floundered and tapped the bulky pile of typewriting with his finger—"is one that will increase the net profits of the Ellerman Company at least one million dollars a year." He paused to give his statement an additional emphasis.

Richard Ellerman glanced coldly at him and said nothing. This silence was disconcerting. Naturally, when you tell a man seriously that you are going to show him how to increase his income to the extent of a million dollars a year, you expect him to display some interest. The least he can do, one thinks, is to expend a little breath in saying, "Go on"—"Now, you're talking"—or "Attaboy"—or some other slogan of approval.

The great man said nothing. . . . The fact is that Richard Ellerman's mind was so constituted that he could not appreciate a million-dollar idea emanating from a fifteen-thousand dollar a year man. He had paid the price of enormous financial success in cynicism and disillusionment. There was a complex mental state behind this attitude. He pictured himself in Hunter's place. If he were a vice-president at fifteen thousand a year and happened to have a million-dollar idea, he knew that he would make the company sweat blood before he turned it over. . . . He decided that there was nothing to it. Only this young man's play for a bigger salary—he thought—he wants to show how bright he is. . . . Hunter cleared his throat and got ready to plunge into his proposition.

"Every Ellerman car has a storage battery," he went on. "That means, Mr. Ellerman, that our company purchases two hundred and fifty thousand batteries a year from the Trojan Battery Company. These batteries cost us five dollars apiece"—a pause here—"they cost the Trojan Company six dollars apiece to make"—another pause here—"so they lose one dollar on every battery they sell to us. It costs them two hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year to do business with us. Why? I'll ex——"

"How do you know these Trojan batteries cost six dollars apiece?" Ellerman asked querulously. "Your own estimate?"

"No, sir," Hunter said with assurance, and produced a typewritten sheet from his mass of documents. "I have their confidential figures. Here's their cost sheet. Obtained secretly, and at vast expense"—he laughed mechanically—"right from their own office."

Ellerman took the paper, looked at it perfunctorily for an instant, and laid it down. He did not like the idea of procuring information by bribing employes; it was a method that might work both ways. It was not ethical.

"The Trojan Company," the vice-president continued, "loses one dollar on every battery they sell to us, but in return they get Trojan batteries on all our cars. Now where do they get off? I'll show you. The average life of an Ellerman car is twice as long as the life of a Trojan battery. Consequently, the Trojan Company sells practically every Ellerman car owner at least one new battery—at some time or other. He pays thirty dollars for his new battery, too. That's their retail price—thirty dollars. Even with their wasteful, extravagant methods of advertising and distribution they make a whale of a profit. Remember the big idea! That is—their big idea is—to sell the car owner at least one new battery during the life of his car. Consequently they make batteries that will give out in two or three years. These new batteries sell for thirty dollars apiece. Out of that thirty the retail dealer gets twelve dollars. This leaves old Trojan eighteen dollars for its share. Pretty good business! The battery costs six dollars to make, and the Trojan Company gets eighteen dollars

net. No wonder they can take a loss of a dollar on every battery they sell to us."

"I know all that, Mr. Hunter," Ellerman said pleasantly.

"Yes, I know you do. . . . The truth in a nutshell, Mr. Ellerman, is that the battery business is in the dark ages. The least investigation of the storage battery industry—and I've made a real one, I can tell you—will show anybody that. It's primitive, inefficient, the backward child of the automotive trade."

"I wouldn't say that," Ellerman commented without a flicker of expression on his impassive face. He spoke like a man speaking through a mask. "The Trojan Company earns fifteen per cent on its common stock. It pays ten per cent dividends. I'd hardly call that inefficient—as you seem to think."

"I don't mean it that way," Hunter said hastily. "Not at all. What I emphasize is that the whole battery business is an unnecessary parasite on the automobile-owning public, and on the motor car industry. It all started wrong. At the very start the manufacturers should have made their own batteries. . . . A storage battery is probably the simplest of all the devices connected with an automobile; a few perforated plates of lead and antimony, filled with lead oxides, and immersed in a solution of water and sulphuric acid—and there's your battery. It's a cheap affair to produce—lead's only five or six cents a pound. Just look at that cost sheet, Mr. Ellerman, and you'll see that the boxes and jars to hold the battery cost almost as much as the lead that goes in it. Of course, the battery manufacturer tries to surround this simple device with an air of mystery——"

"One moment," the motor car magnate raised his hand

slightly and looked into Hunter's face. "Why not get down to your proposition? You've proved, apparently, that we buy our batteries at less than the cost of producing them; yet, in the next breath, you contend that automobile manufacturers ought to make their own batteries. What are you driving at?"

Richard Ellerman had an instinctive quality of secretiveness. He knew precisely what Hunter intended to propose—namely, the establishment of a plant for the manufacture of storage batteries. Lebolt, of the Chicago office—ostensibly the Western publicity man of the organization, but in reality Ellerman's confidential spy—had already reported on Hunter's carefully worked-out plan, and on Hunter himself. "As to Hunter himself," Lebolt had written, "the impression here"—he always made his own opinions and prejudices sound more plausible by intimating that they were the views of all in the Chicago headquarters—"the impression here is that while Hunter is a hard worker, with a good deal of enthusiasm (which is sometimes misplaced), he is not good executive timber. The impression here is that he lacks business ability. His ideas are far-fetched, and usually relate to activities outside the main current of our policy. This storage battery proposition is a sample of them."

Lebolt had no ideas himself, and he hated anyone who did have any.

"What are you driving at?" Richard Ellerman repeated, and looked away indifferently across the blue hills.

"I think you're right, Mr. Ellerman," Hunter said, with a nervous smile. "If you hadn't stopped me I might have run along and given you a history of the battery industry."

Ellerman toyed idly with the Trojan Company's cost sheet. "Did someone ask you to look into this matter—Mr. Stanfield or Mr. Ellicott, or anybody—or did you do it entirely on your own initiative?"

"I went into it on my own initiative," Hunter answered, with a trace of pride in his manner.

"I see. What happened to your railway freight traffic department while you have been doing this?"

"Why, Mr. Ellerman, I've got that department so it can be run with one hand. When I took charge of it a year ago it was a little confused, but now it really doesn't take more than half my time. It's nearly all automatic. So I looked around to see what I could suggest for the company's good in a big, constructive way, and I saw that the battery business is a field where a lot can be done.

"I believe in the principle of the self-contained industry. A manufacturing business as large as ours ought to make every single thing that it uses. Then you control production along the whole line, and—naturally—your product is more uniform. That's why I worked out all this."

"I see," Ellerman said, "you mean you're a man of initiative. . . . Well, go ahead and let's have your proposition."

"My proposition," Hunter resumed, "is that we organize a company—a separate company—for the manufacture of batteries for our own use, and to sell to Ellerman car owners. The Ellerman Company to own it, of course. I'm going to show you how we——"

4

Mrs. Ellerman had emerged from one of the French doors, and was approaching. Hunter stood up and bowed with one hand holding down his fluttering papers. Her husband did not move; his eyes rested on her with a look of inquiry.

Blanche Ellerman was only thirty-six, the age when women get to be really interesting, but she spoiled the advantages of a ripe experience by an inability to forget "The Golden Lily," in which she had made the wonderful success of her career, at the age of twenty-three.

For her the clock had stopped at twenty-three, and since then she had cultivated the aroma of that dead and gone Chinese exotic. Her green and gold mandarin robe, made for her in China, was exquisitely beautiful. At her ears were long, blood-red pendants which, lying against her white skin, had a curious macabre effect. At a little distance they looked like gashes in her neck. Her eyebrows were pencilled in hard, black crescents. Paul Helleu, the noted etcher, named her as the most beautiful woman in America, and as a result she sat for her portrait. When she learned that he had said the same thing to fifteen other women, she was so annoyed that she had his etching of her profile put in the lumber room, among other discarded articles.

"How's business?" she asked pleasantly in a throaty, musical voice that reminded one somehow of perfumed cigarettes. "Booming?"

"Oh, business is going along as fit as a fiddle, Mrs. Ellerman." Hunter managed to fish up a jocular tone from the depths of a nature as unhumorous as a time-table.

"Dick, I've some news. Guess who's coming week after next?"

"I don't know," her husband replied testily. "Some Hindoo?"

"No, my dear, I've a letter from Gerald Poole, accepting our invitation. He makes one condition"—she laughed merrily—"his room must have orange silk curtains."

She turned toward Hunter. "One must make some concessions to genius, mustn't one?"

"Genius!" exclaimed Richard Ellerman. "Who did he ever shoot? Gerald Poole. I never heard of him."

"Oh, you old cross-patch," she said, patting her husband's head. "Gerald Poole is the new poet everyone is raving over. Why shouldn't he have orange curtains in his room? It has been proved that the vibrations of yellow and orange are most inspiring to the creative spirit. Some souls are so sensitive that any little thing can set them jangling."

"Rats!" said her husband. She looked at him and smiled like Leonardo's Gioconda.

"This is his bad day, Mr. Hunter," she said, laying her jewelled hand on Hunter's arm and giving it a noticeable pressure. "If he starts to bite your head off, just call me."

She released his arm and smiled away down the terrace in a cloud of Oriental fragrance.

5

(It's a downright pity that this story will come to an end before Gerald Poole arrives. I suspect that he would make it delightfully complicated. . . . Gerald Poole was a genuine, lily-handed poet. His accent was of Harvard—he

said "brahnch" instead of "branch"; his shaggy coat was like that worn by Thomas Hardy on the Wessex downs; his pipe was from London; the books he read were all bound in pale yellow boards, and had a sort of Aldous Huxley look about them; his shirts were of white soft linen, like those of Bernard Shaw; his underwear was of silk, like that of Maurice Rostand; his hat, made in Danbury, Conn., was of the style affected by Elbert Hubbard in his riper years.

His verse-writing was, after all, only a pastime. Visiting country houses was his real profession. How did he manage it? Oh, that was easy. *Ma chère, il s'est faufile partout.* That's lots more refined—now, isn't it?—than to come right out vulgarly and say he wormed his way in.

Every man has his curse, and the curse of Gerald Poole was the curse of lechery. He made cuckolds as quietly and as gently as a silkworm spins cocoons—and thought no more of it. . . . It was all in the day's work.

These deeds were accomplished by means of sonnets. As soon as he was established in a *milieu . . . dans son cadre de jaune pour mieux inspirer sa muse*, he set to work writing sonnets to "my lady's eyes," "the fair white feet of Nicolette," and "Clorinda's voice of lutes in harmony."

Though his curse was lechery, his blessing was thrift, so when the sonnets had served their purpose, he sold them to magazines at twenty-eight dollars apiece . . . and thus utilized the by-product.

Some despised him. Others envied him. Some considered him a national menace. Others rejoiced.)

Chapter Eight

The Romance of Business

I

HUNTER'S plan had been worked out with the idea of reducing the cost of storage batteries to Ellerman car owners by thirty per cent, while making a profit for the company at the same time.

He proposed to drop the name "storage battery" and put the Ellerman batteries in a class by themselves by calling them Ellerman Accumulators. "We'll use this name in the advertising of the Ellerman car," he said. "It will give it a distinctive feature. . . . There are twelve hundred dealers in Ellerman cars in the United States; every one of them will sell Ellerman Accumulators, and will have a battery service station. Besides that, we'll gradually get several thousand other dealers. You see, in that way, Mr. Ellerman, we will start off with facilities for distribution that the ordinary battery company takes years to build up.

"When a man buys an Ellerman car we'll instruct him to come back to the place where he got his car when his accumulator requires attention—or when he needs a new accumulator. . . . In that way, it will be easily possible to develop an immense business in batteries without much advertising or sales effort."

When he came to the question of income and expense he extracted a sheet of figures from among his papers and handed it to Richard Ellerman. Standing behind him, he pointed out the various items with the point of a pencil and explained them—one after another—in long and unnecessary detail.

“You understand this tabulation, I am sure, Mr. Ellerman,” he said. “I’m basing these figures on a production of five hundred thousand batteries a year—half to be taken by the Ellerman Company, and half by the car-owning public. People will buy batteries from us at \$21.00 instead of \$30.00—which they have to pay at the present time. We shall be doing Ellerman car-owners a great service by this reduction of cost. We’ll save them nine dollars a battery. You see, we won’t have to fight for business—it will naturally come to us—so our selling expense will be lower.”

ESTIMATE

(Based on production of 500,000 batteries of 6-volt, 33-plate type.)

Sales—

250,000 batteries sold to Ellerman Motor Car Company at \$5.00	\$1,250,000	
250,000 batteries sold to public at \$21.00 ...	5,250,000	\$6,500,000

Costs—

Manufacturing 500,000 batteries at \$6.00 each	\$3,000,000	
Commission to dealers on 250,000 batteries at \$7.00 each	1,750,000	
Overhead and general sales expense	275,000	
Advertising	200,000	
Depreciation, taxes, etc.	200,000	\$5,425,000

Annual Profit\$1,075,000

"I figure that the capital required to set up this business will eventually be two and a half millions of dollars," he continued, "but we will need only a million at the start. . . . On the basis of a capitalization of two and a half millions the business will certainly earn forty per cent—there's a big profit in this battery game, you see. . . . The reason the Trojan Company doesn't make a showing equally good is because their stock is watered—they carry ten or twelve millions of dollars of good-will on their books—but in our case, you understand—every dollar of capitalization will mean just that much real value."

2

Richard Ellerman was bored by Hunter's long discussion of technical plans. . . . He was more than bored; he was irritated. He thought this thrusting of details into his face was a piece of tactless impertinence. This attitude he concealed under an air of careful attention.

He was constitutionally incapable of considering any proposition simply as a thought-structure, and apart from the personality of its sponsor. He never wasted his time on processes; he thought only of men. The hiring of men was the beginning and end of business management.

This mental characteristic was the dominant quality of his life. It governed all his personal relations. He did business with the "best" bankers—that is, the larger and more successful banks; he bought his clothes from the tailor who had the best class of business; he was a member of the political party that had the largest number of the best people; his physician was the one who charged the highest fees and had

the best practice; he read the most respectable, most substantial—and, therefore, the best—newspaper in New York.

In the conduct of the Ellerman Company he employed the best managers—that is, the automobile men who made the most favorable impression on him personally, or who were the best paid executives in the service of other concerns. These men talked over their plans with him, but he paid little attention to that. The only thing he demanded was results.

Hunter's method of approach was unsound. What he should have done was to sell himself first, and then, on a wave of personal popularity, he could have put through almost anything that had a reasonable chance of success.

Before the young man had talked five minutes Ellerman had divined every financial feature of his plan; he was not interested in any other feature.

Thereafter, he let his thoughts drift while the stream of words passed by. . . . A couple of chattering sparrows were busy about their nest in a near-by tree, and Ellerman's eyes followed their movements with listless curiosity. At the back of the terrace a matted bank of ivy rose to the battlemented roof. With delicate whispering sounds the light wind played among its leaves.

A wordy young man, Ellerman thought. Doesn't know how to sell himself. Laborious. Too many words. Nothing snappy or keen about him. A pile of papers. Organizer of Second-Rate Club. Rot! The whole scheme could have been put on one sheet of paper. Shall I ever escape from words and statistics! Dammit! Joe Stanfield is president of the Ellerman Company. It's his business to listen to these things. That's why he's president. But they keep on coming here. Maybe they're right at that. . . . How the

devil did this Hunter ever get to be a vice-president? What was it? Some dim recollection of Hunter having reduced the cost of something. It might have been a mistake, at that. Confound it, the organization is going all to pieces. Here's this fellow—why, there are a dozen men in the company who know the battery business from A to Z—why's this chap monkeying with it? Annoying. Then he thought of Mrs. Pratt. Mrs. Pratt. Mrs. Pratt. Soothing. He could see her now in her pleasant rooms on Central Park West, looking over the green carpet of the Park, and its gleaming lakes. She was there right now, with her cheerful voice and deep, quiet eyes—and her music. In her blue negligee. He remembered the day he picked it out for her in that Frenchwoman's shop on Fifth Avenue. She was there, and he was here. Mrs. Pratt. One servant—and a chauffeur. That's the way to live. Mrs. Pratt in her shadowy, cool apartment. He could spend a whole day there, lying around in his pajamas and smoking, and never be called to the telephone. . . . The Ellerman motor car was an institution in this country, and he had raised it from a baby to a giant. Mrs. Pratt said it thrilled her to see the big Ellerman sign flashing on Broadway. She could see it from the windows of her apartment. Mrs. Pratt. How did he ever get started with her? By God, the woman's magnetic. . . . This Hunter's just a little educated slave. I buy brains, and put 'em to work. He has no sense of business organization. Well, I'll show him that Richard Ellerman runs things his own way. . . . Mrs. Pratt. . . . She had never had a lover before—the poor little fluttering creature—she was really pathetic. A pathetic widow. Knowing nothing of the world. Music lessons. Margaret Pratt. . . . Margaret. Margaret. A

woman of good family. Not a gold-digger either. Emphatically not. . . . A fine-souled woman struggling in a rough, rotten world. What would have become of her without me? That's what money is for—to help people out. I've tested her; she's no gold-digger. . . . The day she returned that check for ten thousand. Thanks so much, but she didn't really need it. That settled it. No gold-digger. . . . Will this fellow ever stop talking? . . . She could have a hundred thousand a year, and she knows it. Fifty thousand. That's all . . . maybe a tiny bit more. Fifty thousand a year, and she could have twice as much. . . .

At the bottom Richard Ellerman really loved Mrs. Pratt—according to his own standards. Love meant to him a kind of doll-play, the decorating of women and listening to their soft chatter; and, at times, a sense of physical uneasiness, illuminated by thrills, as summer lightning illuminates a murky sky; and at all times, a gratifying glow of possession, a feeling of power over beautiful, emotional creatures.

3

While Hunter was talking, Ellerman had decided to dispose of the matter by informing him that he would have to put his plan through the regular channels—that is, he could not consider it unless it came through the production department, with endorsements of that department's officials. This verdict was on the edge of his tongue, when he had a hunch. . . . He believed in the Ellerman hunch as Napoleon believed in his star of destiny.

The hunch shot across his mental sky line like a meteor,

and in an instant his manner changed. His face brightened, his eyes became more alert, he sat upright in his chair.

"You've certainly put a lot of work in on this thing," he said briskly. "I hope for your sake something comes of it." ("Here's where he tells me that he has done it all for the company's sake.")

"Thank you, Mr. Ellerman," Hunter said, pleased with his employer's comment, "I only want to do what I can for the company."

"You're sure of your costs? Let me see—you say our batteries cost the Trojan Company six dollars to make, and they sell them to the public for thirty—and we can make them as cheaply as they can; that is, for six dollars?"

"Yes, sir, that's right."

"And they sell them to us for five dollars. That right?" ("I'll have him checked up on these figures.")

"That's correct, sir," Hunter replied. "What do you think of the plan?"

Ellerman's eyes again took on the quality of distance—blank, shadowy pools. "I'm rather favorably impressed by it," he said after a momentary silence. "I don't know yet. . . . What do you expect to get out of it?" ("Here's where he tells me that he leaves all that to me.")

"Oh, I leave all that part of it to you, Mr. Ellerman," Hunter said cordially. "I'm one of those who believe that good work brings its own reward in time."

Then he remembered the last thing his wife had said to him, and he was afraid he had not done himself justice. "I'm not in the habit of throwing bouquets at myself," he added, "but I *will say* that I could run the Accumulator Company and make it pay. I will say that."

"I'm sure you could," Ellerman agreed. Ten minutes ago Hunter had been a prosy bore, drilling his essay on lead oxides and battery grids through the mind of the great financier; now he had become a negligible pawn in the strategy that had come into being with the flash of Ellerman intuition.

"In case anything comes of this proposition, I'll take care of you, Mr. Hunter," he said in his cool, faraway manner. "The first thing we'd better do, I think, is to get an unprejudiced, expert opinion on the plan. Somebody on the outside who knows about these matters."

Hunter was suddenly taken aback by this observation. "Oh," he murmured. "I—I—well, really—of course, Mr. Ellerman, I'm perfectly willing to put the whole business up to anybody who understands what it's about, without—without"—he fumbled in his mind for a suitable phrase—"without any fear of the result."

Ellerman nodded. "Yes. All right."

"One thing, though, Mr. Ellerman," Hunter continued. "Don't forget that I've gone into this proposition to the very bottom. No expert has ever gone into it more thoroughly."

"I know you have. That's why you ought to welcome expert opinion. It will no doubt vindicate your arguments. . . . You see, Mr. Hunter, this proposition calls for a large investment. We've got to be careful in such matters. Rash, hasty decisions are not good in business."

Hunter felt that, by some subtle twist of speech, he had been definitely put on the side of those who decide rashly and hastily. When he remembered his months of preparation and careful research he was vaguely aggrieved. "I'm the last person in the world to——" he started.

Ellerman interrupted him. "I think you've gone into the matter very carefully. Still, to be sure, we must have an outside expert look into it. Leave it all with me and we'll have a conference in a few days."

At that moment a man servant came along the terrace, pushing a wheeled tea table before him. On the glass top of the table there was an array of variegated cocktails in wide, crystalline glasses. The people on the terrace—three or four men in golf suits and a few women in the easy toilettes of a country house morning—took cocktails as the servitor passed, and there was a chatter of animated conversation.

"Have a cocktail," Ellerman suggested.

"No, I thank you, Mr. Ellerman," Hunter said modestly. "I don't believe I care for one."

"Oh, come on," his employer urged. "Forget business awhile. Have a cocktail. William here"—indicating the servant—"is a bartender with a medal."

"No, I thank you. I don't drink. It's not a matter of principle at all—I don't object to other people drinking. I really don't care for it. You see, I never got into the habit, so——"

"Oh, don't let me change your habits," Ellerman said coldly as he drained his glass and handed it back to the man. "Do as you please."

An awkward silence.

"I see you're pretty well supplied," said the vice-president, in the clutch of a deadly fatalism, "do you have much trouble in getting hold of the stuff these days?"

(Oh, Thomas Houghton Hunter, how could you? In the vast Ellerman sky your feeble star is fading. . . . Your

plan may be sound, and the little pal in the pergola may breathe her unspoken prayers, but——)

Richard Ellerman looked at him with inscrutable eyes. "I've never had any trouble, Mr. Hunter, in getting anything I ever wanted in my life. I make other people get things for me," he replied, in a tone of thinly veiled arrogance.

Hunter sensed a feeling of tension in the air. To relieve it, he laughed and shouted, "Mr. Ellerman, you're a brick," in the manner of artificial good-fellowship which he had seen sales managers and glad-handers use with distinguished success.

His employer smiled faintly; then rose and walked into the house, leaving the pile of papers on the table. Seeing that he had forgotten them, Hunter hastily gathered them up and ran after him.

4

The town of Ellerman lies a thousand miles to the west of Shadow Lawn, in the windswept flatness of an Illinois prairie. From afar one sees its canopy of smoke, and the stark red minarets of its factory chimneys.

Thousands of slate-colored, box-shaped houses of uniform pattern. Anemic streets that run straight into the prairie and finally dissolve in a chaos of hen-roosts and garbage heaps. Boys playing rowdy games in frowsy vacant lots. Groups of dull-faced men in overalls and heavy shoes, with dinner pails on their arms. Black-eyed girls with shawls talking to cigarette-smoking youths on the street corners. A glaring movie palace, its front blazing

with light, and its entrance littered with trash. A tiny park with an ornate drinking fountain that dribbles day and night; obscene words written in pencil on its smooth marble sides; bronze lettering which says that the fountain is the gift of Blanche Rayner Ellerman.

Then there is the Hotel Pensaxas. Bedrooms with soiled lace curtains. Spittoons. Ten-foot engraving of a Canadian Pacific steamer in the lobby. Ruled writing paper, muddy ink. Soggy fried potatoes. Waitresses with pretty faces and big feet. Portrait of Richard Ellerman in the dining-room labeled "Our Chief." In the lobby the town's humorist on his throne.

And there is the Marquette Club. Red brick building standing on a lawn. Iron dog school of architecture. Billiard tables. Stuffed alligator on hind feet holding ash tray. Portrait of Richard Ellerman in oils. Reading room—*Literary Digest, National Geographic Magazine, Adventure*, and twenty-four automobile trade journals. Editor of the local daily can be found here around four o'clock. A grubby, pop-eyed man with thick-lensed glasses and a husky voice. He believes the world is now reasonably safe for democracy; the big thing is to silence dangerous agitators; the heart of the worker is in the right place, if he were only let alone by parlor Bolsheviks. He sends his paper to Dobbs Ferry, with the editorials marked. He hopes some day to be Richard Ellerman's private secretary. He has never studied the art of boot-licking; it is a natural gift.

Opposite the Club is the Blanche Ellerman School for Girls. Two hundred adolescents taught by twelve shriveled virgins. Life-size painting of Blanche Ellerman. The twelve desiccated virgins pretend not to know of Blanche

Ellerman's stage career, except "for a short while, I believe, with one of the late Charles Frohman's productions."

On a prominent corner is the Palace of Sweets, run by two enterprising young men. A gorgeous onyx soda fountain. An automatic caramel-making machine in the window. Three rows of little tables. A smell of sour milk. If you are a male person, and the young men like you, they may show you their collection of indecent photographs.

The Y. M. C. A. owes its building to the munificence of Richard Ellerman. A swimming pool filled with stagnant water. A room where youths are playing checkers. Oil painting of Richard Ellerman busy at his desk. A gymnasium giving diversion to three perspiring boys in soiled sweaters. A hall where a chummy man-to-man talk is being delivered by George Fitzpatrick of the Auditor's department of the Ellerman Company. "I am not ashamed to stand up on my pins and shout for Christ," he bawls. It appears, from his own say-so, that George lived a life of vilest degradation for years. Then one day he met Christ, and Christ pulled him out of one hole after another—in fact, Christ tagged along after him and gave him quiet tips. "I've put Jesus in my balance-sheet, boys, and I find he shows a net profit year after year."

The poolroom of Nick Gianopopulous—shortened to Nick Giant. Smell of spilt beer and stale tobacco. Newspaper page about Bingo Ellerman and his lady-loves pasted on the wall. Dusty pool-tables. Mysterious goings-on behind wooden partitions. Nick is introducing a new soft drink, called "Zizzerino, for zizzing in the head." It tastes like a cactus plant looks.

The title of the monthly house-organ of the Ellerman

Company is called "Heart Power." Beautifully printed with illustrations and a colored cover. Filled with inspiration talks, pictures of prize winners of contests connected with work in the factory, stale jokes, a monthly honor list, and a heart-talk to working girls by Miss Beatrice Margolin, who is Richard Ellerman's private secretary. Employees are referred to as "heart-power units," or h.p. units in the abbreviated form. The implication is that the corporation is run by heart-power—"sixteen thousand hearts that beat as one." Since the last strike the little magazine is not so popular as it once was. It is not read any more by many of the h.p. units. Most of them use its pages for pipe-lighting and other plebeian services.

A smoky haze drifts through these streets, and all day long one may hear the clangor of iron upon iron, the humming roar of bridled power, the sound of titanic strife—the birth agony of the earth bearing her children of steel.

5

"Well, honey, how did you come out?" Bessie Hunter anxiously asked her husband. She had put on her pink evening dress, and stood before the tall mirror in their room, looking over her shoulders, and giving her costume esoteric feminine pats.

"Oh, I got along pretty well, I think, dear," Thomas said encouragingly. "Of course, nobody ever decides off-hand on a matter as important as this one is, so I don't know for certain. He's a good listener. I like that. He took in every word I said, and I went through the whole thing. I know it made an impression on him by the questions he asked."

"Well, I'm glad he didn't turn it down," Bessie said. "He's interested, or he would have said so right there. . . . Did you talk about your own salary?"

"No, dear, not yet. That will have to come later. I gave him some hints. He's taking my plan very seriously. Going to call in experts to confer about it."

"I've been meeting some of the people, Tommy," Mrs. Hunter said, "and going around the place. Just look here." With an air of a discoverer Bessie went to a gold-framed mirror in the wall, pressed a button and the mirror swung back, revealing a diminutive lift of nickel, just wide enough to hold a large tray. "When you want to have breakfast in your room, it comes up in this dumbwaiter. Here's a place, you see, for the morning paper, even—a little rack for it. Isn't that splendid?"

"It certainly is pretty nifty," he laughed, "almost like the service in a Statler hotel." Though he made light of these luxuries, he was wonderfully impressed.

"I have a personal maid, too—I'd have you know," she went on, "and you have a valet."

"I've got a valet!" Thomas exclaimed.

"Yes, my dear; you've got a valet. He's been in here, and has sorted out your clothes."

"Good heavens! Has he seen my worn-out pajamas?"

"Yes, he has. . . . He didn't laugh. Looked kind of sad when he saw them."

"Oh, well," Thomas sighed. "God knows, a valet's the last thing on earth I need. By the way, Bessie, old Ellerman and I had quite a laugh over the liquor when it came around. I asked him how he kept supplied——"

"Did he ask you to take a drink, Tommy?" Mrs. Hunter

turned around with a ribbon in her hand and looked anxiously at her husband.

"Yes, he did; but I wouldn't have one."

"Oh, *why not*, dear? Why not? Oh, dear, dear! When he asked you?" Hunter was surprised to see his wife seem so distressed.

"Well, the wretched stuff upsets me terribly, Bessie. You know that. And if I drink two cocktails I feel it for a week."

"You should have taken a drink with him, honey, and been upset. It's all in the game."

"I can't help it," Thomas said, with a crestfallen air. "If I've got to get drunk to succeed in life—then I guess I'll be a failure. . . . Who was that chap you were talking with in the pergola?"

"His name is Perceriddle."

"Perceriddle? That's a funny name. How do you spell it?" Thomas paused with his comb and brush in mid-air. "Perceriddle."

"His name is Percy . . . Riddle," Bessie laughed. "First name Percy; second name Riddle."

"What sort of pinhead is Percy?" Thomas inquired. He felt vaguely out of sorts.

"He's an interesting man, my dear. Don't call people pinheads, Tommy, before you know anything about them. He has lovely manners, and he knows something about a great many subjects . . . used to be a polo player." Her manner toward her husband was always gently didactic.

"Oh, yes—yes," her husband announced with the air of a man remembering an unimportant fact. "Percy Riddle, I've heard of him. Tremendously rich, isn't he?"

"I don't know. He didn't say. We got quite chummy. He likes people, and he's been up in the Arctic—and he knows grand opera, and all about big game hunting, and Texas oil wells, and Egypt, and yachting, and poetry . . . he recited some."

Her husband tugged violently at the tie he was slipping under his collar, and muttered something. "And, oh, Tommy, he says," Bessie continued, "that the correct side of Fifth Avenue for an afternoon stroll is the west side. You don't walk on the east side of the Avenue—it simply isn't done. . . . And in London, the north side of Piccadilly is the proper thing."

"What is it in Paris?" Thomas demanded and glared at his own reflection in the mirror.

"Oh, in Paris, so Percy says—he asked me to call him Percy—in Paris one is supposed to stroll on the Café de la Paix side of the boulevards; and in Berlin the fashionable side of Unter den Linden is the side the Hotel Bristol is on—there's nothing much but automobile showrooms and ticket agencies on the other side. So he says."

"Well, you've collected a fine lot of useless information," was the fierce verdict of Thomas Houghton Hunter.

"It's not so useless," his wife pouted, "if one travels much. It's nice to know the correct thing."

"You think so, eh? It will never do you or me much good. We'll do our strolling on the east side of Wabash Avenue, Chicago. . . . I'm sorry I came here. You and your friend Percy must have told each other the story of your lives. . . . While I was working like a dog."

Mrs. Hunter, overwrought by the excitement of the day and her husband's caustic tone, quietly turned her face to

the wall, leaned her head against it and cried. Her husband was busy with his cuff buttons and did not realize for a moment what she was doing. When he saw her sobbing he thought she looked thin and pathetic, and a choking ball rose in his throat. The sensation of being an inhuman brute.

"Now, now, pet," he whispered, with his arm around her shoulders. "I know I've been harsh. Forgive me, dear. I didn't mean to be. That damned fathead got on my nerves, and I took it out on you. Stop crying, pet—please, won't you, and say you forgive me."

"Oh, go away, you've spoiled my trip, you mean thing." She continued to cry, dabbing her face occasionally with the tiny wet ball of handkerchief she held in her hand.

Her husband put his arm around her waist and lifted her gently across the floor and deposited her on his lap in one of the arm chairs. She hid her face on his shoulder. . . . In five minutes she was again before the mirror, powdering her nose, and telling more of her experiences to a chastened husband.

". . . and do you know who's here?" Mrs. Hunter seemed excited to the explosion point with her information.

"Yes. Michael Webb," her husband replied. "The writer of that wonderful book."

"Yes, dear. I know, but I wasn't thinking of him. Miss Fanny Thornton, the motion picture star—the greatest in the whole world—is one of the guests. I met her. . . . She looks even more charming than she does in the movies."

"My goodness!" her husband exclaimed, tremendously impressed by these renowned presences. "I'll bet I've seen her on the screen a thousand times."

“Well, she’s just as nice . . . just a nice girl—simple, too,” Bessie remarked. “She hardly ever says a thing, though. Listens to everybody, and looks perfectly sweet.”

Dinner was to be at seven-thirty. At seven twenty-nine Mr. and Mrs. Hunter slowly walked down the spacious stairs and found the living room empty save for Michael Webb, who, with his hands clasped behind his back and his legs spread apart, was gazing intently at an enormous painting over the fireplace.

Chapter Nine

A Proofreader Marks a Hyphen

I

“OH, hello,” Michael said as Hunter and his wife came up to where he was standing. “They don’t seem to go on a strict schedule in this house, do they? . . .”

Michael and Mrs. Hunter bowed at each other and, after a moment’s hesitation, Bessie Hunter timidly extended her hand. There was a thin current of uneasiness in her feelings. She had read in many fashionable tomes that the *beau monde*, as it is termed, is always late in keeping its appointed hours; yet, in spite of this erudition, on the very first day at Shadow Lawn she and her husband had made the mistake of appearing in an empty salon all dressed and ready for dinner. She had imagined herself sauntering down a wide staircase into a baronial hall filled with a brilliant throng.

On what trivial things does one’s happiness depend!

“Well, I suppose you discussed your plan with the great man,” Michael said.

“I did,” Hunter replied eagerly. “He seemed to take to it very well, but of course there is no decision yet. It’s a big thing, you know——”

"Oh, yes—a large proposition," Michael assented almost inaudibly and shook his head.

"Mr. Ellerman wants to get some expert advice from an outside source before making up his mind," Hunter continued. "That's holding the thing up just now. We may be here a week. He wants me to stay on until he can look into the idea from all sides."

Michael Webb felt a sudden tingle of interest run through his mind—just as one feels when some attractive Chinese puzzle comes drifting into an idle afternoon.

"Oh. . . . Wants some expert outside the company to look over your idea, eh? I should think there would be people in the Ellerman Company competent to pass on it."

"There are. We have a superb organization," Hunter said, and seemed a little mystified. "I don't know what Mr. Ellerman's idea is, but I can understand—can't you?—that he might like to have an unprejudiced opinion."

"Who is the particular expert he has in view," Michael asked. "Do you know?"

"No, I do-on't—not really. I don't think he had decided when he spoke of it this morning. . . . Say, do you know anything about the maze here on the estate?" Hunter continued. "Mr. Ellerman told me a lot about it this morning. It seems to be one of his pet hobbies."

Mrs. Hunter was vividly interested. "I'm sure I'd get lost in it," she laughed, "but I'd like to try."

"Anybody would get lost in the Ellerman maze, Mrs. Hunter," Michael remarked. "It's just a trick of arranging rows of hedges and alleys in such a way that you run into blind corners, and get so turned around that you are both coming and going at the same time."

"I suppose you're familiar with it?" Hunter suggested politely.

"Oh, no. No, I've never been in it. I read metaphysics instead. I like mental mazes better than physical ones. When I feel the need of a maze I spend an evening reading Freud."

That did not mean anything to the Hunters. To them Freud was a name seen through a mile of mist. They both smiled. Hunter resolved to look up Freud in the encyclopedia. "You're a philosopher all right," he said jovially. "Reading Freud." . . . Then his mind went back to his storage battery proposition, and he continued. "I think I sold Mr. Ellerman on the idea. I could almost read his mind as I talked."

Michael reflected that anyone who could read Richard Ellerman's mind ought not to feel discouraged before any kind of maze. A mind checkered into a pattern of makeshifts and expedients, but at the same time both simple and baffling in the quaint directness with which it went after whatever it happened to want. His was the type of intellect that leads unerringly to great business success—a mind moving in one dimension, without depth or breadth, but incredibly flexible and adaptable to the needs of the hour. Richard Ellerman's reputation for profundity arose from his unexpected resourcefulness; and this, in turn, was the product of a makeshift intellect. He had no definite plan, and no far-reaching vision, but he knew how to surmount obstacles as they arose. In his essential relations to life he was like a peddler on a country road, meeting people who came by, and getting the better of them.

As these thoughts came to Michael he was on the point of

uttering them. But he knew that neither Hunter nor his wife would understand him.

"What is this picture, anyway?" said Hunter, nodding toward the immense dark canvas on the wall. It was filled with figures, nearly life-size, of men who seemed to have been stricken dumb, and who were all staring hard at nothing with an air of violent abstraction. "It's all smoky, and looks like something bought at a fire sale."

"Now, Tommy," whispered Mrs. Hunter, nudging him with her elbow, "you don't know a thing about paintings, and you better wait until you learn what it is."

"I saw you looking at it when we came in," Hunter said to Michael. "I'm sure it's a great work of art—and something to be admired."

"It certainly is," Michael explained. "It's a Rembrandt. One of the most celebrated. It's called *A Proofreader Marks a Hyphen*."

"You don't tell me!" Hunter exclaimed. "Is that the picture there was so much about in the papers last year?"

"This is it," Michael said sententiously. "You're looking at a world's masterpiece."

Hunter recalled the story in the public prints when Richard Ellerman brought *A Proofreader Marks a Hyphen* from Belgium. A fabulous sum had been paid for it, undoubtedly, but the actual price was never revealed.

"I'll have to take a good look at it," he said, going closer to the canvas. "I suppose the fellow sitting in the center is the proofreader, eh?"

"Yes, he's the proofreader. This painting represents a momentary pause before the hyphen is marked. It's almost photographic, you see, in its sharp, clicking conception of

that final instant. The proofreader has his pen poised in his right hand. . . . The faraway look in his eyes—you get that? The face of a mystic. It is as if he had a gleam of the ultimate implications of what he is going to do. It's a gaze that peers through the centuries."

"Oh, isn't it wonderful," Mrs. Hunter rapturously exclaimed. "I could just look at it all day."

"It is a mighty fine thing," Hunter said, "when you begin to study it."

Its surface was too dark to reveal some of the figures; the people in the background dissolved into shadows; and the hard, dry paint had millions of tiny cracks running through it. "By George, it's all there, isn't it?" Hunter continued. "The atmosphere's sort of tense. How does he get that tense effect?"

"That's Rembrandt's secret," Michael said. "He excelled in that—and in the art of chiaroscuro."

"Oh, yes; chiaroscuro," Mrs. Hunter murmured.

"You can always tell good chiaroscuro," Michael went on. "The darker the painting, the better the chiaroscuro. This one is almost black, and the chiaroscuro's fine. Rembrandt's *Black Cat at Midnight* is even better."

"But who are the people?" Hunter asked. "What are they doing in the picture?"

"The man on the left," Michael pointed, "the man in rich velvets and silks, with a trailing plume over his ear—he's the author. You see, he swaggers a little, and stares at the group with a touch of the superior manner. . . . There behind the proofreader is a man in brown—the master printer. He seems perturbed as he looks over the proofreader's shoulder. The learned Ostwald, who wrote the

best monograph on this painting, says that the master printer was opposed to marking the hyphen. However, that's a matter of controversy——"

"Look at the kid," Hunter laughed. "He's the only one who's smiling."

"Oh, the boy with his thumb to his nose and his fingers outspread. He's impish, isn't he? He's supposed to be the printer's devil. The light falls full on his face, you'll observe, and no matter where you stand, he turns toward you—or seems to—and wiggles his fingers. That was one of Rembrandt's strange tricks of technique."

"What genius!" Hunter said with reverence. "It's a wonderful picture—that is, as a work of art, but why such a fuss over marking a hyphen?"

"Allegorical," Michael replied. "Everybody marks hyphens now, but in those days it was different. Very few people could write at that time, to say nothing of putting in hyphens. . . . This great painting is an allegory depicting the advent of order and discipline in literature. The title tells the story—a proofreader marks a hyphen. Gone are the old, wild free days. Literary technique has come into being. The very air is alive with meaning. You can see it in the solemn faces of the burghers gathered in the background, in the woman with the pitcher—you observe that even her chattering tongue is silenced. A proofreader marks a hyphen."

"Mr. Ellerman is a great patron of art," Mrs. Hunter timidly remarked. "Fancy what a wealth of fine paintings there is in this house."

"Yes, there are many paintings here, and very costly ones," Michael agreed, and his hand, sweeping through the

air, included the house in a comprehensive gesture, "but Mr. Ellerman is not an art patron at all."

"How do you make that out?" Hunter inquired.

"Well, it's a matter of fact—or rather of definition," Michael answered. "Art patron means to me some one who patronizes artists. I doubt if there are more than half a dozen pictures in this house under fifty years of age. He doesn't buy the work of living artists, so while he may have two million dollars' worth of paintings here, none of it is of the smallest value in encouraging living painters."

"There's something to that," Hunter said.

"Yes. He's not a patron of art. He's a patron of dealers in old pictures. How much do you suppose Rembrandt got for painting this picture here?"

"Oh, I don't know. How much?" Hunter asked.

Mrs. Hunter remarked that the newspapers declared that Mr. Ellerman paid three hundred thousand dollars for it.

"Maybe he did," Michael said. "Surely not much less. But the official records in Holland show that Rembrandt himself got a sum equivalent to about two hundred and fifty dollars in these days."

"Just think of that!" said Mr. and Mrs. Hunter in chorus.

2

It was now a quarter to eight, and people were beginning to come down. Michael thought the women looked like colorful birds and the men like black beetles. The Hunters drifted away, and Mrs. Ellerman glided up to Michael and held him in conversation. . . . No, it was not conversation; it was talk. Blanche Ellerman knew how to talk by the

hour without saying anything at all. You can laugh at this if you want to, and point a derisive finger—but you shouldn't. It is really a fine art, and is complicated. Blanche swam through its technique with ease, and her talk was graceful and charming. Perfumed words.

Michael envied her ability. He had tried to learn this art, and had taken lessons in a mental gymnasium, but the result was disappointing. It was almost impossible for him to say fifty words consecutively without causing people to think of God, the Darwinian theory, the failure of civilization, the proletariat, Vachel Lindsay, the collapse of the Versailles treaty, the pretense of virtue, and bunk in general.

He realized his failing, so his part in the conversation with Mrs. Ellerman consisted of "Indeed," and "Isn't that lovely!" said over and over. That is all she expected him to say, and she considered him a very nice man. . . . He was to take Miss Merrifield in to dinner, she informed him.

"And who is Miss Merrifield?" he inquired.

"One of our neighbors. She lives in the next house down the road." . . . Michael remembered passing a diminutive white and green Italian villa with a charming ivy-clad wall about it while coming up from the city.

"Edith has lived in France for the last six or seven years," Mrs. Ellerman continued, "and returned only last Fall."

"She must like the Gallic temperament. Does her family live there?"

"Oh, no. Bachelor girl. She has no family. I think she does like the French. There she is now, I'm sure." There was a faint noise of a motor car at the door, and Michael caught a glimpse of a small woman in an evening wrap passing through the hall.

3

The dinner table was lighted by wax tapers set in slender and curious holders of Lalique glass. The snowy table cloth, the cool flowers and the delicate dishes of faience and crystal gleamed mildly in the softened light, but beyond this oval there was a zone of semi-dusk. An animated blur of delicate women-faces, faint rose, orange and mauve fabrics, iron-black coats and violently white shirt-bosoms.

Miss Merrifield was plain looking; that was certain. A woman of about thirty, small and slender, with grayish green eyes. A white flatness about her face—a pallor that was emphasized by the rich copper shade of her hair.

At first there was not much general conversation. Everyone talked in low tones with his neighbor. Richard Ellerman sat silently at the head of the table, abstracted, the far-away look in his eyes.

Across the table from Michael sat Bingo Ellerman and Miss Fanny Thornton, the queenly motion picture star. Bingo kept talking to her in a tone so low that it was hardly above a whisper. He was relating something to her that he evidently thought amusing, for he punctuated his recital with chuckles. She looked at him with serious, open-violet eyes and said nothing.

A Mr. and Mrs. Dennis tossed some abstruse family joke at each other back and forth across the table, with laughter. Nobody else knew what it was about; it was like a strange comet streaking its way through the universe.

Another guest was Miss Violet Fleming, a dark-eyed young lady who always made an impression on men, for her appearance and manner suggested, or delicately inti-

mated, a combination of boldness, vivacity and subtle secretiveness. One felt that she was destined to have an interesting future, and was drawn to her as to a fascinating problem.

And there was a buxom Mrs. Shadbolt, so plump and high-breasted, and laced so tightly, that she seemed to Michael to be in danger of pouring out over the top of her evening dress, as tooth-paste is squeezed out of a tube. Her husband had not returned from town, and her anxiety was disturbing.

"He said he'd surely be back for dinner," she gasped, "and he's never done this before. No word even. What can have happened to him?"

"Maybe he missed the train," someone suggested.

"Or met a lady friend," said Bingo Ellerman. "I guess not, though, on second thought. In that case he would have telephoned a good excuse."

Mrs. Shadbolt lifted her eyebrows in a frown that was both refined and supercilious. The idea! Young Ellerman was insufferable, and ought to be made to live in the rooms over the garage with the chauffeurs. She knew her husband too well to suspect him of improper conduct. Besides that, she was fortified in her confidence by the fact that he was one of the eight partners of the great banking house of Chatfield, all of whom had been selected by the head of the firm on the basis of moral purity as well as the possession of money-changing ability.

"Don't worry about him, Frances," said Mrs. Ellerman placidly. "He's all right. If I worried about Dick failing to get home to dinner I'd be gray-haired."

No, she didn't worry about Richard Ellerman; she knew

all about him. She was well informed about Mrs. Pratt, though she pretended to know nothing. Not only that . . . she had known about Mrs. Pratt's predecessors—Mrs. Sterling, and that black-eyed Floralin woman whom Dick finally married off to a motion picture producer . . . had to set him up in business to get him to take her . . . and there was Daisy Coleridge, the magnetic vaudeville actress. She was really subtle and charming, and Blanche was downright jealous of her for awhile. But Dick finally lost interest in her. . . . Blanche thought that she could well afford to smile. Richard Ellerman had given them their dark little apartments and cream-colored limousines, and that's all . . . mere trifles. . . . She had married him.

"How's your father, Charlotte?" said Richard Ellerman to Mrs. Frank Lloyd, on his right.

"I beg pardon," Mrs. Lloyd chirped, with a quick, bird-like toss of her head. She was thin, a little deaf, and turning gray. A sparkling diamond tiara was enmeshed in her dead-looking hair. Ellerman had known Frank Lloyd and his wife for thirty years. When he first knew her, Charlotte was a clerk in a law office. In those days Frank was a young lawyer, and he and Richard Ellerman were chums.

"I said is your father well?" Ellerman raised his voice and spoke into her ear.

"Oh, as well as could be expected, thank you," Mrs. Lloyd replied. "His rheumatism, you know. It bothers him a good deal. He was eighty-six this March."

"Uh-huh . . . well, old age, of course. . . . You know, Charlotte, I'm afraid I've got a little touch of rheumatism myself. Sciatica, maybe. After I go to bed at night I sometimes have a pain right here in the small of my back"

—he reached behind himself and touched his back—“it keeps me awake.”

“I’ll tell you, Dick”—she spoke in the habitual low tone of semi-deaf people—“what you’ve got is probably nothing but a little neuralgia. You ought to see a doctor occasionally.”

Ellerman shook his head, and said he didn’t believe in doctors.

“I know you don’t,” Mrs. Lloyd continued, “and I’ve always thought that very foolish of you. Well, you take a hot-water bag—a large one—and place it right against your back every night, and it’ll soon relieve the pain.”

Ellerman smiled; like most men, he considered hot-water bags comic.

“Frank has a chill every now and then,” she went on. “In winter especially, when he’s been at his office all day. When he comes home I put him to bed, tuck him in, and put a hot-water bag on each side of him. It brings him around right off. In half an hour he’s calling for his pipe and the evening paper.”

“What’s that you’re saying about me up there?” her husband called out in a cheerful voice from where he sat next to Mrs. Ellerman. He was an alert, wiry, keen-eyed man with a great shock of white hair.

“Oh, just a little nonsense,” Ellerman replied.

“If it’s nonsense let’s have it,” Lloyd said with a laugh. “We need a little foolishness.”

“That’s right,” lisped Michael Webb’s neighbor on the left—a receding, suppressed personality known as Aunt Laura—a relative of Blanche Ellerman. “A little nonsense now and then is relished by the best of men,” she lisped into

Michael's ear, and he caught the tang of some modest, old-maidish perfume. "Isn't that so, Mr. Webb?"

"It is indeed," Michael agreed. "There ought to be a professor of nonsense in every college, so we could learn how to handle the whole subject of nonsense in an intelligent, efficient manner."

"Well, I wouldn't go as far as that," said Aunt Laura thoughtfully, "though I do think nonsense is appropriate and enjoyable at certain times."

4

"It's quite warm for early summer," Michael remarked to Miss Merrifield.

"Yes, it is," she said. "I saw some butterflies this morning. Gorgeous, beautiful creatures sailing through the air as lightly as falling leaves. Flowers on the wing."

"That's a beautiful image," Michael said. "Flowers on the wing. Flying flowers. Do you ever write verse?"

"No, I don't," she replied, and glanced at him with a questioning interest. "I wonder if I could. I've never tried. It would be lovely to create something beautiful."

"Why not try?" he suggested.

"I think I'm without any creative ability; and besides, just think how many people are writing verse, and most of it so poor."

"But the fine thing about it is the effort. I think everyone ought to give part of his life to the creation of beauty . . . not especially to help the world, but to help himself. A race of artists."

"Artists in what?"

"In everything. The creative instinct is as strong in men as it is in—in—in beavers. But we suppress it, in this age of machines and subdivided labor. . . . It's a pity. . . . And the creative instinct flowers into beauty as surely as the apple-tree flowers into blossoms. . . . I fear I'm preaching. It's a vicious habit."

"No, you're not. What you say is most interesting, and I agree with every word of it." A puzzled expression came over her face. "Are you the Mr. Webb who wrote *The Importance of Being Second-Rate*?"

"Yes, I am. You don't like my book, I know."

"I liked it at first. I thought it really funny—and clever. A clever piece of sarcasm. I bought it at Brentano's in Paris when there was so much talk about it. Summer before last. At that time I lived at St. Germain-en-Laye—I have a little house there—and I started reading it on the train going back home that day. It was delicious—but since I have come back to America, I'm astonished to find it taken everywhere as a philosophy of life. I hope you don't mind my frank expression of opinion. As a philosophy of life. . . . I suppose that's how you intended it."

Michael turned and looked at her with a feeling of unusual interest. "No, I considered it sarcastic myself, but that seems to be a secret between you and me."

"Really?"

"Yes. It's a complete fizzle as a piece of humor, but an immense success as a cosmic philosophy. I started out to make a reputation as a humorist, and have ended by becoming a cheap imitation of Herbert Spencer. I'm a philosopher."

"Well, why don't you correct the popular impression?"

"Too late," Michael asserted. "The philosophy of the second-rate has gone too deep into American life. If I were to come out now and declare the whole thing a joke, the shock would be too great for the nation to stand. I should be the Benedict Arnold of American literature—execrated by millions."

"Poor man!" murmured Miss Merrifield.

"And, besides that," Michael went on, "there's no doubt the book has done an immense amount of good—in its way."

"In what way?"

"Why in teaching people how to get along in the Age of Authoritative Mediocrity. I have some of the most interesting letters from readers. I recall one from a garage man. He said his life was now far, far happier than he had ever dreamed it would be.

"When cars came in for repair, you know, he used to fix them in bang-up shape. He did everything he could think of to make them just right. The poor devil was a first-rater and didn't know it. There was always a big row over the bill; people wouldn't pay; they hated him.

"Then, he says, he read *The Importance of Being Second-Rate*. Now, he does just enough to a car to get it out of the shop and run for six hundred miles. His bills are light, his customers are pleased, and at the end of six hundred miles the car is back again. His life is sweeter. . . ."

"He must be our local repair man," Miss Merrifield smiled. "That's his practice."

"He may be. I shouldn't be surprised. I've forgotten where he lives."

She laughed. "Oh, I see your purpose now. It's probably

a very useful book, but I'm glad its author is not the least bit like it."

"No, I'm not like the book. Authors seldom are. The greatest love story I ever read was written by a lady fifty years of age who had never been married—in fact had never been in love at all. Lack of experience gave a free rein to her fancy."

A rubber-heeled butler went softly around the table filling the fragile, thin-lipped glasses with champagne. Nobody made any comment; this proceeding was taken as a matter of course.

Mrs. Hunter caught her husband's eye and she shook her head slightly and frowned. She wanted to caution him not to ask Mr. Ellerman where he got his supply of champagne, but he thought she was trying to tell him not to drink it. He did not want to drink it anyway, so he felt relieved.

The talk became more animated and cheerful. Personalities began to unfold. People talked of things in which they were really interested. . . . Hunter felt moved by the common spirit of vivacity to enter into conversation with Mrs. Shadbolt and explain to her the mechanism of the Ellerman car, and describe the points wherein it excelled all other automobiles. . . . She listened politely and said "Indeed!" "How clever!" and "How ingenious!" Whenever he paused and seemed to expect comment she uttered one of these phrases, using them all in rotation. . . . She was really thinking of her husband's failure to arrive or telephone. Wealthy men are so beset by designing women (she thought of them as sirens), and after all—does any woman really know her husband?

She was riddled and vexed with doubt.

Chapter Ten

The Overthrow of Bolshevism

I

WHILE the gentle babble of voices rose around him, Richard Ellerman sat at the head of the table, silently thinking of his past, and of the things that come into a man's mind when he has crossed the crest of fifty years and realizes that his life is sloping downward toward sunset. . . . The hum of talk and the blur of faces receded and seemed far away.

Ever since he could remember he had been looking forward; life always lay just over the next hill. . . . But now, and for the last five or six years, other kinds of thoughts had come into his mind. He began to feel, with the slow movement of a day slipping into twilight, that he had already experienced life. What he had gone through was life itself—and it had seemed so short. . . . He was gradually losing the faculty of experience. Now, as always, he sought pleasure, but he experienced it only as a routine. . . . That's all there was to it. It was a sombre thought to realize that there was nothing new on the other side of the hill. . . . The great adventure was over, and henceforth there would be nothing but small things. And the visions of the past rose before him more and more vividly. In fancy he

lived his youth over and saw it again in images of men and events.

He thought of his first job. Thirty-seven years ago! In remembrance the scene came to him as swiftly and as vividly as a blow in the face. Thirty-seven years. It seemed yesterday. The struggling, hard-bitten little college in the hills; its bare rooms and shabby teachers; the row of test tubes; the second-hand microscope, the skeleton with rags tied to its ribs by somebody as a joke. And the chilly, crowded dormitory that stood on the slope where Ellerman Hall now rears its impressive front of red and white. How little he had learned there of men and the world! The professors themselves were ignorant of life—well-meaning, mild, impractical men. They thought the study of Shakespeare and geometry had something to do with success.

His first job. The milk cans. At four o'clock every morning he had to get out of the dormitory, hitch up the horse and deliver milk in the village. In the spring it was daylight when he made his rounds; the dew whipped the feet like the water of a brook; and the trees sang with birds. But in the winter the stars were still in the paling sky, and it was bitterly cold. The snow lay deep and white on the hills, and the black firs on their summits slashed the pallid sunrise into ribbons of light.

And in the middle of the afternoon he would sit in the classroom, tired and hungry, and fall asleep.

(It was a poor college, thin of blood and inarticulate of speech. But who knows what will come from what? Gaunt and haggard as she was, she reared a wolf that ran through the world and brought back Ellerman Hall and a million dollars and laid them at her feet.)

Then he was back in Midland City—really a village, but called a city in anticipation of an august future. . . . The Monroe Tinplate Company. He got a job as its payroll clerk and cashier. . . . The elephantine machines cutting tin into strips and then delicately bending and folding it with precise fingers. . . . The gangs of men in overalls. . . . And their dinner pails and stinking pipes.

For two years he had worked like a dog. He had to do what is ordinarily done by three clerks. As he came and went he thought about things; not as other men thought, but differently. And finally he came to the conclusion that work is absolutely fatal to great financial success. A man might work hard and save a competence, but he was not interested in saving a competence.

That work is the enemy of fortune was an idea that arose first in his mind as a nebulous conception; then it slowly hardened into flint. To make a fortune a man must be entirely free and independent; he cannot afford to be bothered with work; he must make others labor for him.

He considered this—after a test of thirty-five years—the most valuable idea that he had ever conceived. All his life he had kept it a secret; he never intended to tell anyone. It was a dangerous fact. Suppose it were known to everybody and believed by everybody? . . . Chaos. . . . He silently folded it in its wrappings and laid it back in his mind.

2

“Well, Mr. Ellerman,” chirped the jolly, rosy-faced Mr. Dennis during a lull in the conversation, “how’s the big

McCallum Copper pool getting on? Putting up the stock pretty fast, eh?" This was a maladroit remark on the part of young Mr. Dennis. At the dinner tables of financiers guests are not expected to ask questions about any stock manipulation in which their host may be interested. Richard Ellerman mentally catalogued Mr. Dennis as a tactless person.

"I don't know anything about it," he replied, rising out of his reverie as a diver rises from the water. "Not a thing. There is a pool in it, I believe, but I don't know what luck they've had. What is the price of McCallum common today, Percy?"

Percy Riddle looked reflectively at his plate as if trying to remember. He was a dilettante in the stock market, infected at times with feverish gambling enthusiasms which rarely subsided until he had lost a year's income. In spite of his social contact with the leaders of finance, and generous advice from market specialists, he was always hopelessly wrong, for he lacked the mental power necessary to carry on any kind of financial operation.

"Percy's my stock market authority," Richard Ellerman added, and winked at Michael Webb. This appeared to be a joke to everybody at the table except the Hunters and the deaf Mrs. Lloyd. They all laughed and looked at Percy Riddle.

"It closed today at 77 or 78, I forget which," he said, "I think it was 77. But it was 85 last week. Still at 77, that is quite a rise—isn't it, R. E.—from 52?"

"Huh! It is indeed," Ellerman said.

"Oh, please give us a tip on it, Mr. Ellerman; now, won't you?" Miss Fleming eagerly asked, her bold, vivacious face

lighted with anticipation. "I read in some paper the other day that you were the man behind the movement. Is it going up still further, or is now the time to sell it? And surely, now—just a word——." She had not read it; one of her stock-broker friends said he thought the stock was being manipulated by what he called "the Ellerman crowd of speculators."

"My dear young lady," said Richard Ellerman impressively, "you mustn't believe all you read. I give you my word of honor that I don't own a single share of McCallum Copper stock, and I haven't bought or sold a share of it in at least ten years. I don't believe in stock speculation; I am not a speculator. This ought to set at rest any talk of my being in the pool." He looked sharply around the table. Miss Fleming had an air of disappointment, and everyone seemed faintly crestfallen.

In making this statement Ellerman experienced a glow of satisfaction. He liked to tell the truth, and what he had said was literally true. . . . He was not in the pool; his only connection with it was that he supplied the money to the members of the pool, and the operations were carried on by expert manipulators. He loaned them the money, and they divided profits with him. . . . The plan once decided upon, he paid no attention to the fluctuation of prices, so it was absolutely true that he did not know what the last quotation was, nor did he own any of the shares.

It was also true that he never speculated, for you cannot apply that term to a sure thing, and he dealt only in certainties. As to the current McCallum Copper pool, there was enough money behind it to buy the entire floating supply of the company's stock, if necessary, so there could be no doubt

as to the outcome. . . . Just at that moment the manipulators were letting the stock drop back, accompanied by a flood of pessimistic rumors. They hoped to start a wave of short selling, and then—at the right time—they intended to hand every short seller a blow with the iron fist that would make him wish he were dead.

3

Richard Ellerman motioned the servant, standing in the shadow, to fill his glass with champagne. . . . Yes, before he had been with the Monroe Tinsplate Company very long he found out that work is fatal to financial success, and he did not know what to do about it, because he had to work to live.

Chance settled the matter. How clearly it stood out in his memory! An unshaven, hollow-eyed laborer, standing before the office window, and asking if he could have a five-dollar advance on his wages. He remembered how the man's hands, with their black, broken nails, pressed against the bronze grill-work.

"It's against the rules to make advances on wages," he told the man, but I'll let you have the five out of my own pocket, and I'll take five-fifty out of your wages on pay-day. You see how it is, don't you? I charge you fifty cents for the loan."

"All right," the man said. He was so anxious to get the money that he hardly listened to the terms.

That was the beginning of the loan business. In three months he had a capital of five hundred dollars loaned out continually to the workers in the plant. From this he made

a profit of twenty-five dollars a week. In six months he had a thousand dollars out; and in a year three thousand dollars, with one hundred and fifty dollars a week coming in as interest.

One day Monroe sent for him, and he went into the private office where three generations of bearded Monroes looked down from the walls. "I want you to take your hat and get out of here as quickly as you can," Monroe said, his face blazing with an inner heat.

Richard Ellerman recollected that he had not lost his temper. He had always thought it absurd for a man to get in a rage over a question of business. "You seem to be in a fret," he said to his employer.

"I'm indignant," Monroe came back violently. "I've just found out that for the past year you've been lending the men money at five per cent a week." He waved a paper he held in his hand—a paper covered with figures. "Two hundred and sixty per cent a year."

"Well, they were perfectly willing to pay it," Ellerman said.

"Willing!" Monroe exclaimed. "Of course they were willing. What do they know about interest rates? They're just children, and can be led by any sharper. It's a dirty shame."

"I'll make you eat those words," Ellerman said, as he picked up his hat and left.

That same day he rented a little office on a side street and put up a sign: *Richard Ellerman, Private Banker*. In less than a year he was making six hundred dollars a week in one way or another, and the *Midland City Express* spoke of him contemptuously as "our local Shylock." His business

expanded; he borrowed money at six per cent and loaned it to clerks and employees all over town on usurious terms.

Then he conceived a notion which, if it had been known in Midland City, would have caused the entire population to consider him insane. His notion was to get control of the Monroe Tinplate Company.

For a long time he had pondered over this problem. It had taken Charles Monroe a year to find out that Ellerman was carrying on a loan business at the cashier's window, so evidently Mr. Monroe was not a good observer. Ellerman remembered that Monroe had said on the day he discharged him, that the men were "just children, and could be led." In these two facts he thought he saw a basic weakness which he might turn to his own advantage.

His first move was to get one of the clerks in the Monroe Company's office hopelessly involved in debt. From this clerk he got all the reports concerning the company's condition, its resources, its orders on hand, and its obligations, as quickly as Charles Monroe himself got them.

This information revealed the fact that the concern had a large current indebtedness, with many notes outstanding and maturing at frequent intervals. . . . Its margin of profit was small, as all its business had been obtained on a competitive basis, but it had a steady income from long-term manufacturing contracts.

Ellerman's plan was to shove a splitting wedge in between these two sides of the company's business structure. If such a wedge could be jammed in with enough disruptive force, the result was certain to be disaster. . . . The Monroe Company would then be separated from its income but not from its obligations. To accomplish this result the

control of the labor in the plant was necessary—so he thought.

He saw the successive steps, one after the other, in his curious straight-line thinking. . . . Curious because it is so rare.

Then he began to build up the scene, laying on suggestions and ideas as a painter lays colors on a canvas. When the men from the Monroe plant came to borrow money he talked to them in a brotherly way about their affairs. "Why, you boys oughtn't to be borrowing money," he said in his kindest manner. "You ought to save money instead of being always in debt." . . . Not to get ahead in the world is a reproach; and when this reproach is held up before a man's face, he instinctively fishes deep in his soul for an excuse. It is the instinct of moral self-preservation. . . . The wages at Monroe were too low, the men said, to let a man save anything, and their child-like minds flickered between self-pity and resentment. "But if you stand together you can get a better deal in wages. Of course it's none of my business," he added, "and I don't want to be quoted in the matter, but I can tell you right now that nobody ever wins anything without fighting for it."

He hired secretly some of the more obstreperous to circulate among their fellows and organize a labor union. . . . This was a novelty in Midland City. It was a secret order, with grips, passwords and mummery, and was immensely popular—but existed entirely under the surface. Charles Monroe never knew his people had a labor union until twenty-four hours before the strike was called.

After these ideas had been set in motion Richard Ellerman began to burn the midnight oil, studying every detail

of the company's financial condition, especially its maturing obligations, its cash assets, and its orders on hand.

The strike came like a flash of lightning. A violent demand for much higher wages, received by Monroe and his board of directors in gasping surprise. . . . And a refusal. . . . And every wheel was struck by paralysis. Dust settled on the elephantine machines, and the strong iron fingers held grotesquely aloft their half-formed tin buckets. . . . The demands of the men were thought unreasonable by many people.

The strikers were supplied with money by their union, but where the union got the money nobody knew. . . . For months the strike dragged on squalidly, and the dispute was enveloped in a fog of motives and antagonisms. Something was moving behind the scenes . . . a soft-footed, stealthy something. Some thought it was the Tinplate Trust, trying to wreck the company and then buy it out. . . . Richard Ellerman said his business had been ruined by the strike. Certainly it had been badly hurt, as the workmen could no longer make payments on their loans. . . . After being patient a reasonable time the buyers of tinware began to cancel their contracts and look elsewhere for goods. The creditors of the company started to sue it on its unpaid and overdue obligations.

Then, just when the men had grown tired of loafing and were about ready to go back to work, the company collapsed like a house of paper. Richard Ellerman appeared at the court hearing as the representative of nearly every important creditor—and it turned out that he was a creditor himself, as he had bought some of the unpaid notes—so he got himself appointed receiver.

Within a week he produced a plan to reorganize the company. The old stockholders were to be left with practically nothing and a new lot of stockholders was to be taken in and given control of the business.

New stock was to be issued, and Ellerman made himself responsible for selling it. For his services he was to be paid a large bonus of common stock. . . .

It was an anxious and critical time for him, and it seemed for awhile as if he would fail in the whole undertaking. Nobody would buy the stock. . . . Finally he induced an Indianapolis banking concern to take the whole issue, giving them an enormous commission. They created a market for it, and on the wave of artificial optimism, he sold every share of the stock he had received for his services.

Midland City was dazed by this swift succession of events; and emotions were divided between sympathy for the downhearted and inefficient Monroe family and admiration for the talented and practical young financier. The *Express* no longer referred to Ellerman as "our local Shylock." It spoke of the activity of the new administration, of new buildings proposed, of modern machinery to be installed, of "the wheels humming again and bringing prosperity to our firesides." The town had been on the knife edge of anxiety while the strike was going on; there was universal fear that the plant would be permanently closed. Now all fundamentals were dissolved in glamour. The distinction between enterprise and greed faded away. There was a glitter of financial romance about the resuscitation of the concern.

Richard Ellerman had no intention of becoming the king-pin of a cheap prairie town, so with two hundred thousand

dollars in cash and securities in his suit-case he bought a ticket for Chicago. He was then twenty-four years of age, and as lean and hungry as a jackal.

As these memories swept through his mind he glanced around the shadowy oval of his guests and gazed for a moment on the flowerlike faces of the women, the gentle-speaking men, the delicate food, the exquisite china, the straw-colored wine bubbling in the glasses, the attentive servants, and he said under his breath, "All soft . . . too soft . . . all soft people . . . me too . . . but, by George, I was a man in those days."

4

The time he first saw Clutterbuck stood in his recollection like a sharp etching. He had been in Chicago three days and was wondering what to do. A wind-tossed snow that struck the flesh like powdered steel had blown and sifted all night through the streets. As the morning advanced it piled up before the Palmer House and men came into the lobby as to a refuge, shaking their shoulders and stamping feet heavy with snow.

Inside the hotel the air simmered with warmth. Ellerman leaned idly over the clerk's desk and chatted about the weather. An old man in a shaggy coat turned up over his ears came in, and without looking to the right or left, made his way with shuffling feet and bent shoulders across the lobby to the dining-room. "See that man," said the clerk, "well, he's the biggest hypocrite in seven counties. It's old Clutterbuck."

"Clutterbuck, the wheat king?" Ellerman exclaimed. He

had always thought of the great Clutterbuck as a tall, dignified person, clothed in majesty and dispensing Fate to lesser men as one ladles out soup.

"Yeh, that's the boy. Old Clutterbuck. A sanctimonious hellion. You wouldn't think to look at him that he lives in a regular palace on Michigan Avenue. They say he keeps thirty-five servants."

Ellerman stood a moment irresolutely tapping his teeth with his thumb-nail and thinking. Then he made his way to the dining-room and took a table where he could watch the old man's movements. Clutterbuck appeared to be oblivious to everyone. He bent his head over his plate and sometimes picked up pieces of meat with his fingers. His nose was long and straight, his lips thin and white. He seemed cold and remote, like a man who had decided to look upon all humanity as an enemy.

When he rose Ellerman followed him out. In the lobby he placed his hand on Clutterbuck's shoulder, and said, "Mr. Clutterbuck, I'd like to have a word with you. I think I can tell you something that will interest you."

The old man shook his shoulder free and said coldly, "I'm not buying life insurance, or anything else," and continued his way toward the door.

"I don't want to sell you anything," Ellerman continued, walking by Clutterbuck's side. "I've come up from Midland City especially to show you how to make money." The words were hardly out of Ellerman's mouth before he realized how asinine they were. He was flustered by Clutterbuck's blank indifference. The old man stopped a moment before passing through the revolving door. "You'll hav^z to think up a new one," he said, "That gag's old enough to

have whiskers. Besides—I never talk to bunco-steerers in hotel lobbies.”

5

When Richard Ellerman thought of this rebuff he chuckled with laughter. For some reason that he had never been able to analyze his entire career with Clutterbuck had always seemed to him to have been a queer sort of comedy.

“What’s so funny, Dick?” inquired Charlotte Lloyd, turning her best ear toward him. “Did somebody tell a good story? That’s the annoying thing about being hard of hearing. You miss so much.”

“No, Charlotte, I was just thinking of old Mr. Clutterbuck. You didn’t know him. It was in the old days. Your husband knew him.”

“Surely I knew him,” she insisted, half-indignant at being overlooked in the matter of memoirs. “Of course. He used to be around a lot when that young man was a baby”—she nodded toward Bingo on the other side of the table.

“What’s that about Clutterbuck?” called out Frank Lloyd.

“Oh, I was just thinking about him a little . . . about the time I induced him to give me a job.”

“Tell us, Mr. Ellerman,” said Thomas Hunter, “I know it’s interesting.”

“Yes, do,” chirped several others. The talking at the table stopped as suddenly as a phonograph when the needle is lifted.

“He was a wise old bird,” remarked Bingo Ellerman. “I take off my hat to him.”

“You certainly ought to,” said his father, looking at Bingo

with a straight, level gaze. "If I were you I'd take off two hats every time I heard his name mentioned.

"It is a rather interesting story—in a way. When I first met Mr. Clutterbuck he was known as the wheat king. He never was as rich as he was supposed to be, and at times he was almost broke. But he was a great power thirty years ago. I'd made a good deal of money—that is, a good deal for a young man of that period—in reorganizing a tinplate company at Midland City. The company had been ruined by a strike and was flat on its back. . . . The town depended largely on the company, and something had to be done. It was none of my business, but I was just a young buck—you know how young fellows are—and I naturally thought it was up to me."

Everybody laughed at this.

("I've heard this before," Miss Merrifield said to Michael. "He tells the same experiences over and over.")

"Well, I succeeded in putting the company on its feet, and almost worked myself to death in doing it—and once or twice I thought I would lose out on it, but I didn't. All's well that ends well, you know. . . . After that I came to the conclusion that Midland City was too small for me, so I went up to Chicago. . . . Two or three days after I arrived I saw old Mr. Clutterbuck eating his luncheon in the Palmer House. He was a queer old genius. I'd heard a lot about him, and the idea got in my head that he was just the man I wanted to work for. . . . You see, although I had had some experience, it was all in a small way, and I really didn't know anything about the methods of big people. . . . My notion was to get in with Mr. Clutterbuck and learn——"

"I often wish I'd done something like that," Percy Riddle

interrupted. "I mean—you know what I mean—sometimes I wish I had gone in for efficiency and that sort of guff."

Percy Riddle's remark fell on emptiness and was lost. "So I approached him in the Palmer House," Richard Ellerman continued, "and he gave me a cold, hard throw-down. He never did care much for people. I couldn't even get a chance to tell him what I wanted. Peculiar old man. He told me he didn't talk to bunco-steerers in hotel lobbies."

"The very idea!" exclaimed Blanche Ellerman. "To think that of you!"

"He didn't really mean anything by it, Blanche," said Frank Lloyd. "It was just his manner of speech. He was a rough man, you know."

"I made up my mind then," Ellerman went on, "to see him at all cost. A throw-down always makes me try harder. . . . Well, that afternoon I had some cards printed. They read: *Richard Ellerman, Bunco-Steerer*. I thought that would catch his imagination, and it did.

"Next morning I went to his office and the clerks laughed when they saw my card. But it got me in all right. . . . I remember how the old man looked, bent over his desk, his spectacles on the end of his nose. He didn't ask me to sit down . . . just looked up at me and said 'Well, you've thought up a new gag, I see. I'm busy, so spin your yarn.'

"I wanted a job with him, not for the money—I had money of my own—but just to learn. I told him so. . . . Nothing doing. There wasn't any opening in his office, and if there was, he wouldn't give it to me, he said. He liked to have workers around him. That's what he said. I suppose because I told him I had some money he thought I wasn't a worker. . . . Well, I've worked hard all my life,

and work even now. At that time I ate it up. I told him I loved work. He shook his head, and went on looking over a lot of papers, wetting his thumb every time he turned a sheet.

"I was on the wrong tack. . . . So I took another course. The first thing I did was to pull up a chair and sit down. I told him that recently I had reorganized the Monroe Tinsplate Company, and put it on its feet. He only grunted and continued to look at his papers. 'Mr. Clutterbuck,' I went on, 'you are one of the few people living who can appreciate the ins and outs of what happened to the Monroe Company. I'm going to give you the whole story, unexpurgated. I'm the only person who knows it.'

"He said nothing—no encouragement—just kept on wetting his thumb and turning over his papers. I set out and told him the complete tale of the company—sparing nothing. It's what you call today the low-down, inside dope.

"Before I had half finished my story he stopped looking at his papers. He turned around in his chair and stared at me. Bushy eyebrows—keen eyes—well, he didn't bat an eyelash; I thought he'd look through me. . . . When I had finished he said, 'You don't want a job; you'd be wasting your time.'

"'Yes, I do,' I answered. 'I want to work with you. I can help you, and you can help me. Do I get a job?'

"'Sure,' he said, just as short as that, 'if you want it.'

"'Doing what?' I asked, naturally.

"He hesitated a bit. 'I haven't anything for you to do,' he said, 'but I'll give you a desk and put you on the pay-roll, and in a week or so we'll talk over something.'

"He pushed a button and a young fellow came in. He

told this clerk to give me a desk. 'But how much salary do I get, Mr. Clutterbuck?' I asked. . . . 'I dunno,' he answered, without looking up. 'You go tell the cashier how much you want.' "

"You mean he let you fix your own salary?" Hunter inquired eagerly.

"It seemed so. I told him I was used to making big money. 'All right,' he came back, and never looked at me. 'All right; tell the cashier when you've made up your mind how much you want.'

"And so that was that."

"How much did you tell the cashier you wanted?" asked Michael Webb.

"Well, sir, it was a puzzle," Ellerman continued. "I thought I might as well start off big, so I hesitated between twenty thousand and thirty thousand a year. I knew I could earn twice thirty thousand even without a job. I went back to the Palmer House to think it over, and finally came to the conclusion that I would say twenty-five thousand. Then I went to bed. Next morning the old reliable hunch came into my mind like a flash, so I went right over to Clutterbuck's office and told the cashier to put me down for ten dollars a week."

"Ten dollars a week! What do you think of that!" said some one.

"Yes, ten dollars a week. I was with him four years, and I never once received a raise of salary. The ten dollars was a standard office joke. I remember the last year I was there the cashier used to bring the ten dollars—a ten-dollar gold piece—to me on a tray—a little comic ceremony, you know."

"The most interesting part of your story," said Michael

Webb, "was the part you left out. Won't you tell us what you told Mr. Clutterbuck about the Monroe Tinplate Company?"

"No, I couldn't do that," Ellerman replied. "It concerns other people. I really couldn't. . . . Nothing much to it, anyhow—except a rather skilful financial manipulation."

"I'm sure it would be very illuminating," Michael insisted.

"Perhaps . . . I don't know," said Richard Ellerman slowly. "However, I'm not in the illuminating business. I'm simply telling an anecdote."

6

The story of the ending of his business connection with old Clutterbuck is even more interesting than the beginning, but it was one of Richard Ellerman's innumerable secrets—and he never spoke of it to anyone.

He grew swiftly in the old man's esteem, for Clutterbuck admired silent, gum-shoe trickiness above all other qualities. . . . At that time the grain market was inactive. For several years the tone of speculation had been quiet, with small fluctuations, and Clutterbuck had devoted his energies to other lines, mainly to real estate. Immense preparations were being made in Chicago for the forthcoming World's Fair, and houses and lots around Fifty-third street—and as far south as Jackson Park—were growing daily in value.

Ellerman, with his enormous capacity for adapting himself to a money-making idea, learned all about the real estate business in a few weeks. He became Clutterbuck's representative in this field, and then he began to improve on the old man's methods.

In getting hold of a piece of residential property, Clutterbuck knew nothing better, as a formula of acquisition, than to haggle with the owners avariciously until they came to his terms out of pure disgust. This method was unreliable, desultory, and without system—and frequently it was without result.

Ellerman had more advanced ideas. . . . His plan was to purchase a few pieces of property in residential districts, and then—after making sure that there were no legal restrictions on the type of building he intended to put up—erect on these lots flimsy wooden houses of the tenement type, and fill them with Poles, Hungarians, and negroes. He bought corner grocery stores and turned them into bar-rooms. . . . Neither Clutterbuck nor Ellerman were publicly connected with these manœuvres. They were carried out by the real estate firm of Leeward & Halsey, who were quietly financed by Clutterbuck's money. The memory of Leeward & Halsey is execrated in Chicago to this day.

The result of this form of colonization was a rapid depreciation in the price of surrounding property. When values had gone low enough Clutterbuck and Ellerman unostentatiously bought everything in sight and began to clean up the neighborhood. . . . All this was vastly harder to do than it sounds, and young Ellerman showed himself to be a wonder at negotiation. The surrounding property owners endeavored to have restrictive laws passed, and Clutterbuck and Ellerman joined them in this crusade. But for some reason it was impossible to get the ordinances through at that time. . . . Even Clutterbuck never knew how this was handled, though he paid out various sums of money on Ellerman's say-so to people with strange names

who apparently had nothing to do with either laws or real estate.

While this bright commerce was in its apogee, Ellerman ran across a man from Midland City at the news-stand of the Auditorium Hotel. This person, a leading merchant of the town, coldly shook hands with Ellerman and looked at his watch. . . . The glamour of his achievement was not as great in Midland City as it had been at first. The town had slowly absorbed the fact that the Monroes had been hornswoggled out of their business, that Ellerman had secretly contributed to the strike fund, that the new capitalization of the company was so enormous that it was not possible ever to earn a dividend on the common stock, which was then selling at sixteen dollars a share (it had sold just after the reorganization at seventy-two), and that—and this was the keenest thrust—the control of the company was no longer in Midland City. It was held by a syndicate of financiers in Cleveland.

So the man from Midland City gave Ellerman a fish-tail handshake and clicked his watch. "How're you getting on?" he asked perfunctorily.

"Oh, on the crest of the wave," Ellerman responded. "I'm in the real estate business."

"Well, that's a good business. Down in Midland City we had an idea you might become an auctioneer."

"No; real estate," said Ellerman. "I'm in with Horace Clutterbuck."

"Is that so? Well—that's news," said the man from Midland City. "Has Clutterbuck got a daughter?"

"Yes. He has one child—a daughter."

The man from Midland City tapped Ellerman impres-

sively on the chest. "Mark my words," he said. "That lovely girl will be Mrs. Richard Ellerman."

"I never thought of her in that light," Ellerman protested.

"You will, though. You'll think of her in that light," insisted the man. He looked at his watch again and started off. "That is, unless her father fails in business," he said in parting. "In which case, I withdraw my prediction."

It turned out, in the end, that the random forecast of the merchant from Midland City hit the nail of truth squarely on the head. Clutterbuck's daughter became Mrs. Richard Ellerman, and there was not a cloud in the sky. In 1896 Ellerman earned one hundred and forty thousand dollars from his real estate operations—as his father-in-law's representative—besides another hundred thousand from his own investments; and, at that time, he was only twenty-eight years old. And that despite the fact that 1896 was a year of pronounced business depression.

Then, suddenly, old Clutterbuck learned through some unknown source of information, that his son-in-law had been getting a commission from both sides—and even worse: In at least one case (maybe more) Ellerman had borrowed money from Clutterbuck, bought property with it under another name; and then had sold the property to his father-in-law, so he made a profit on the sale, getting the money from Clutterbuck at a low rate of interest. This was a piece of really ingenious financial strategy, but its finer points were lost on Clutterbuck. He called it a crude swindle—which was a ghastly mishandling of English words. It was not crude—nor was it a swindle.

Ellerman and his father-in-law parted company, and did not speak to each other for five years.

Clutterbuck left his entire fortune, at his death, in trust for his daughter, and after her demise, to her children, with a proviso in his will which read that Richard Ellerman was not to be one of the trustees, nor was any of the money to be paid to him "under any guise, pretence, or device." . . . The Clutterbuck fortune fell thus into the hands of Bingo Ellerman, and now and then was mentioned facetiously by the New York newspapers as The Chorus Ladies' Pension Fund.

7

"Are you still active in the de-bunking business?" Percy Riddle inquired, speaking across the table to Michael Webb.

"Oh yes," Michael replied. "I keep busy; in fact, I have more than I can do. You see, the science of de-bunking is new, and we're finding out more about it every day. . . . Finding deposits of bunk in the most unsuspected places."

"Oh, it's all so interesting," cooed Blanche Ellerman. "These new sciences. Is de-bunking anything like theosophy? I'm awfully interested in that."

"I don't know," Michael replied with sincerity. "We shall have to learn lots more about both before I can answer that question. The science of de-bunking is the science of reality."

"Then it's exactly like theosophy," Mrs. Ellerman said, and looked brightly around the table.

Bingo Ellerman whispered something to Miss Thornton and laughed.

"I read somewhere in a newspaper, Mr. Webb," said Frank Lloyd, "that you said there is grave danger of bunk

suddenly destroying the world. Were you correctly quoted?"

"I didn't say there was any danger of it destroying the world. I said there was danger—and a very great danger—of it destroying civilization."

"How?" asked Richard Ellerman.

"Why, through a sudden flare-up of reality," Michael answered. "In a world of bunk, Mr. Ellerman, we are like people living in a powder magazine. You strike a match, and the whole thing blows up. . . . In small quantities bunk doesn't matter, any more than a trace of explosive gas in the air matters, but when the world is charged with it—as it is at this moment—it's a serious thing. A catastrophe might easily occur without a moment's warning."

The people at the table seemed momentarily stunned, for Michael spoke with the voice of authority.

"What would bring about such a disaster?" Frank Lloyd asked.

"A sudden exposure to reality," Michael answered. "Reality is to bunk like a lighted match to powder. That's why I move so slowly in my de-bunking business. We must handle reality carefully."

"Oh," Lloyd said, evidently relieved. "Most people do handle it very carefully."

There was a complete silence for several minutes. Michael Webb thought it strange to see so many people engaged in introspection at the same time. "For my part," said Richard Ellerman, breaking the silence like the sudden snapping of a tense thread, "I always treat people as I would like them to treat me. No bunk for me. . . . My old mother—she was a poor, hard-working woman, but she knew a few

things—she used to say that *Do as you would be done by* should be my guide throughout life. I've always remembered what she said."

"Yes, it's the best rule after all, Mr. Ellerman," said Mrs. Shadbolt.

"That's right," echoed Frank Lloyd, his shock of white hair bobbing as he nodded his head. "In the law, it's sometimes rather difficult to do, especially when you know your client is in the wrong. But when such cases come up—and I try to avoid them—I always keep in mind that somebody has to present each side of every case, otherwise there would be no justice."

"Certainly," Richard Ellerman said. "It's the same in finance. In business affairs, large business—corporations and so on—a man has to look out for the interests he represents—for his stockholders. Many a time in various business deals I would have given in to my opponents, but when I thought I had my stockholders' interests to look after, it made me buck up."

Miss Merrifield said to Michael, "I think we have a case here for the exercise of your scientific skill."

"We have indeed. A serious case," Michael replied, "but I'm not working today. This is my vacation."

8

The dinner had reached the stage of dessert, when the missing Mr. Shadbolt arrived, to his wife's joy.

"Well, Robert," said Richard Ellerman, "what's your excuse; or haven't you thought up one yet?"

"Excuse?" Mr. Shadbolt queried, and looked at his wife.

“What excuse? Oh, for staying in town? No, I’ve had my dinner”—this to a servant who was hovering near—“but I’ll take a little cognac and coffee. Well, I have some news for you. I stayed in town to get it. It’s amazing, too, let me tell you. Astounding.”

“News! What?” Everybody said or looked.

“The big news is that Bolshevism in Russia is completely beaten. Licked to a frazzle”—he waved his hands and his words tumbled over each other in his excitement—“hopelessly whipped. The leaders have all surrendered. Except Trotzky; he’s run away.”

All eyes were turned on the newcomer. Percy Riddle knocked over his glass of cognac, but no one paid any attention.

“But how? What’s happened?”

“The *Boston Evening Transcript* has conquered Bolshevism! A great battle has been fought. The *Transcript* has won!” Shadbolt continued.

“I don’t believe it,” said Michael. “It’s a false report. I know the *Boston Transcript* is carrying on a war against the Bolshevists, but I don’t believe a decisive battle has taken place.”

“You don’t, eh?” Shadbolt said. “Well, here it is in the paper. All the late editions have it”—he spread a newspaper on the table—“look at these headlines. The story is thrilling.

“Why, the way it was is this—the *Boston Transcript* fired volleys of words taken from the best conservative sources. They proved conclusively that Bolshevism couldn’t possibly exist, that it never had existed, that it was already on its last legs, and——”

"Oh, that has been done before," Richard Ellerman said in disgust, "it's no good."

"One moment," Shadbolt held up his hand for attention. "I'll tell you the rest. The volleys of words from the political economists and manufacturers' conventions caused great disorder in the Bolshevik ranks, but the battle was not yet won.

"The *Transcript* didn't hesitate an instant. It dragged the word *psittacism* out of the dictionary—it used *psittacism* in deadly volleys——"

"Psittacism?" asked Mrs. Hunter. "Is that really a word?"

"Yes, it's a word," Michael said. "But its use in warfare is prohibited by the Hague convention, on account of cruelty. They had no right to employ *psittacism*."

"You may say that," Shadbolt exulted, "but desperate diseases require desperate remedies. The *Transcript* was mad clear through. That word won the battle, really. They're going to put up a monument to *psittacism*."

Everyone in the room sat for a time in amazed silence. It was a historic moment.

"Fine for the *Transcript*!" exclaimed Mrs. Shadbolt. "It always has been a great, daring, forward-thinking newspaper. I recall—vividly—T. S. Eliot's wonderful poem written in its praise, to celebrate the hundredth year of its age, I think. I thought it so good that I memorized it."

"How does it go, Mrs. Shadbolt?" Miss Merrifield asked.

"It's quite short," Mrs. Shadbolt replied, agreeably, and without any of the hang-back embarrassment that people usually exhibit when requested to recite poems. She cleared her voice, and said, "It runs like this." Her delivery was

charming, though her manner was slightly melancholy—to fit the character of the verse :

“The readers of the *Boston Evening Transcript*
Sway in the wind like a field of ripe corn. . . .
When evening quickens faintly in the street,
Wakening the appetite of life in some
And to others bringing the *Boston Evening Transcript*,
I mount the steps and ring the bell, turning
Wearily, as one would turn to nod good-bye to Rochefoucauld,
If the street were time and he at the end of the street,
And I say, ‘Cousin Harriet, here is the *Boston Evening Transcript*.’”

“Bravo! Good!” cried Richard Ellerman. “The *Transcript* is a very respectable newspaper. I’ve heard before of the fight it is making against radicalism. I suppose it carries our advertising; if not, I shall have it put on the list. Really, a sheet like that ought to be encouraged.”

“How beautifully you recite!” rippled Miss Fanny Thornton in admiration.

“Oh, I’ve had a little training—and some *amateur* experience,” said Mrs. Shadbolt, blushing modestly.

“The poem stops too abruptly,” Michael Webb commented. “It doesn’t say what Cousin Harriet did. If you’ll permit me, I’ll add a few lines, and——”

“Go ahead,” everybody said in chorus. “That would be jolly.”

“Well, I’m not a poet like Mr. Eliot,” Michael continued, “so my addition will be pretty crude, but this is what I would add, if I were running a poetry shop——

“Cousin Harriet, wearing her reading glasses,
Peruses the first page, the last page,

And all the intervening pages; and droops
Like a sunflower turned toward sunset.

'I see,' says Cousin Harriet, 'that Jewett Sproul is dead. Of
old age.

I knew him well during the Civil War.

His mother was a Springer; a Rhode Island Springer.'

"Why, that's very good," said Frank Lloyd. "Don't say you're not a poet after that, Mr. Webb. Send it along to the *Transcript* with Mr. Eliot's poem. I'll wager they'd print it. They'd appreciate it, anyway."

"Oh, yes," Michael replied. "They'd be tickled to death. They'll kiss me on both cheeks for this day's work."

"Well, the main thing is that it's the end of Bolshevism," said the motor car magnate. "I wonder if the *Boston Transcript* will take over Russia now and govern it."

"There's some talk of that, I understand," Shadbolt said. "But it's too early yet to know for sure. The whole country—especially Boston—is celebrating tonight."

"It seems to me that a word like *psittacism* would kill anything," Richard Ellerman remarked. "It's apparently a sort of verbal poison gas. Probably wiped nearly all the poor devils out. . . . What are they going to do with the ring-leaders?"

"Probably going to send them into exile," someone remarked. "A new lot of Napoleons for St. Helena!"

"No St. Helena for them," Shadbolt said. "One suggestion is—I've just read it in the paper—that *The Boston Transcript* ought to send them to Camden, New Jersey; and keep them there."

"Why Camden, of all places in the world?"

"A perfectly simple reason," Shadbolt replied. "You see,

Walt Whitman lived in Camden for twenty years. While he was alive nobody in Camden knew he lived there, or had ever heard of him, and now since he's dead the inhabitants don't know where he lived, when he died, or what he did when he was alive. All they know is the phonograph works and the canned soup factory. If Tchitcherin is sent there, it's a safe bet that in three years he'll be so submerged in oblivion that nobody can find him. Books will be written to prove that he never lived."

"Oh, such a punishment is too cruel," said Mrs. Ellerman as she rose from the table. "*The Boston Transcript* ought to have a heart."

Chapter Eleven

One Who on Honey Dew 'Hath Fed

I

THE next afternoon Michael Webb strolled across the lawn and sat down casually beside Miss Fanny Thornton, who, seated charmingly in a wicker chair under a huge lawn umbrella of white and orange, was watching a tennis game at a distance.

"How are you, Miss Thornton?" he murmured. "You look more famous than ever, sitting here. A close-up of you under this umbrella would be wonderful."

"Would it? You think so?" she said with eager animation. "I'll have to remember this effect for my next picture, as it appeals to you so much. I understand you're famous, too."

"Me? A de-bunking specialist is not famous. Notorious is the word. I'm notorious."

"Oh," said the great motion picture star, displaying Emotion No. 18, that of Friendly Sympathy. "I'm sorry. But *you are* a famous writer. Some day I'm going to read all your novels, and—and—things."

"Oh, my, yes! I'm a great writer, if that's what you mean. . . . Speaking of writers, I see you're reading

Shakespeare." He pointed to a thin gray and blue volume of *As You Like It* in her lap.

"Yes, I'm reading Shakespeare critically. I'm going to be Rosalind in our screen version of *As You Like It*, by William Shakespeare. Modernized, of course. But I really prefer *Hamlet* as a play. Don't you?" She gazed at Michael with a look of passionate inquiry. "Oh, Shakespeare means so much. He is so won-der-ful"—she paused and daintily smoothed her frock—"so big. An ocean. Think what one feels in *Hamlet!*"

Michael was fascinated by her manner. He had the impression of listening to a marvelous speaking doll. He wondered what kissing her would be like.

"The feeling in *Hamlet* . . ." he mused. "Just what do you feel in *Hamlet*, Miss Thornton?"

She looked at him and smiled. Her eyes reminded him of dark blue rain on a distant, summery horizon. . . . Seeing her smile, he no longer marveled at the fantastic stories of men in lonely places, who having once seen her face on the screen, wandered away dazed on their snow-shoes, and were never the same again.

"Oh, in *Hamlet*—in *Hamlet*," she intoned, with her arms outspread dramatically. "I feel the whole wide, wide world. . . . Everything."

Michael reflected a moment. "Well, you've probably got a pretty good feeler," he said with dogmatic emphasis. "A better feeler than most people."

This comment was no doubt well meant, but it did not wholly please her, though she would have been at a loss to say why. . . . She remained silent, exhibiting Emotion No. 11, that of Silent Disapproval.

Miss Thornton had intelligence without brains; her emotional nature was as plastic as dough; and she was so beautiful that she seemed unreal. This rare combination of qualities inevitably leads to dramatic success. In all essential respects it is to the stage what radium is to nature; and it has, naturally, an enormous financial value.

For her services a motion picture company paid Miss Thornton a salary which was at least four times as large as that received by any person in the United States engaged in trade, manufacturing or finance. To get a workable idea of it, do this: Take first the salary of the President of the United States; add the salaries of a couple of the more hefty railroad presidents—say those of the Pennsylvania Railroad and the New York Central; put in four average bank presidents; thin to the consistency of gruel with sales managers and shrewd executives—four or five will do; and if anything else is needed, add bookkeepers, school teachers, stenographers and mechanics by the handfuls as required . . . the result should be seven hundred and twenty thousand dollars a year. Even at that, the press agent of the film company was so bitten by the craze for bigness that he had to lie about it, and hinted at the “peerless Miss Thornton’s salary being more than a million dollars a year.”

Miss Thornton’s enormous wages were not the result of a mysterious pull with the financial backer of the company, nor was she anybody’s mistress. The truth is that she was a paying investment.

3

Michael caught the shade of silent disapproval, and thought he had better change the subject.

“Dramatic art—the stage and the screen—dramatic art,” he began, and lost his way. “I’ve a thought here, Miss Thornton . . . let me see how I should say it. What I mean to say is that dramatic art is singular among the arts in that the great artist overshadows the subject matter of—the subject with which he deals. Generally speaking . . . I mean the great actor makes the subject matter of his play relatively unimportant.

“It isn’t so in the other arts. They’re more impersonal. Architecture is the most impersonal of all, and then there’s sculpture. Who cares anything about a sculptor’s personality? In literature, the author doesn’t make the book. The book makes him——”

“The book makes *him*?” Miss Thornton queried vaguely. “It’s the other way around, isn’t it? The author makes the book, doesn’t he? That’s what he’s supposed to do.”

“I mean he doesn’t overshadow the book. If he does, the book’s no good. But the great actor does overshadow the content of his play. . . . It reveals a very definite degeneration of the work of the dramatist. People don’t go to see plays—most of them don’t. They go to the theatre to see actors and actresses. A really good play ought to be powerful enough to stand even very bad acting.”

“Yes, I know. You’re right. I’ve always said that the play’s the thing. Hamlet says that, I think. If not Hamlet, somebody said it, anyway.”

"The play's the thing," repeated Michael mechanically.

"It's so difficult to get good scenarios," Miss Thornton said. "You're a writer; why not write a scenario for me? If you wrote one, I am sure Mr. Fellowes would consider it. He's kind to writers, even when they are unknown."

Mr. Fellowes was Miss Thornton's personal director. A man of great talent. He took her in hand at the beginning of her career. It was he who devised the plan of teaching her the emotions by numbers. No. 1 was Startled Curiosity—the eyes wide open, the lips parted, and the right hand laid on the heart. . . . And so on, up to No. 43, which was Drivelling Passion—a rolling on the floor at the man's feet, her French dressing gown wide open, exposing her lacy lingerie regardless, with her arms clasped around the man's knees.

"We-ell, about the scenario, Miss Thornton, I—I—uh——" He hesitated, but not for long. You've probably met people like Michael Webb. He is the kind of person who agrees to do anything, on the spur of the moment, that takes his fancy.

"My strong point on the screen, Mr. Webb, is charm—and a scenario, to fit me, must show me in a charming rôle." She gave Michael such a look of arch winsomeness that his heart jumped, and he readily believed her natural rôle to be charming.

"I can well believe it," he murmured.

What's the use of women with brains, anyway—he thought silently. Helen of Troy didn't have any—the face that launched a thousand ships, and burnt the topless towers—and all the rest of it.

"I've never tried a scenario," Michael said, "but I have a

play in mind, and it could readily be adapted to the screen. I haven't written it yet——”

“If it isn't secret, you might tell me about it,” she said. “Of course, my part in it would have to be quite—prominent—of course, you understand. And charming.”

“No, no, it's no secret. I'm the only author in the world who could write it, and there's no objection to telling anybody about it. Your part would be prominent and charming. Shall I tell you the story?”

“Surely,” she said graciously. Closing her volume of Shakespeare, she snuggled down lazily in her chair and assumed a cuddling attitude. Any picture fan would have recognized it as her pose in “Marjorie” when she played the part of a little kiddie listening to grandfather tell Peter Rabbit stories.

“The action takes place inside of John Smith,” Michael began. “Place: *Interior of John Smith*. Time: *The Present*.”

“Inside of John Smith?” Miss Thornton's silver voice ran waveringly over the words. “What in the name of Heaven is that?”

“It's simple, Miss Thornton. John Smith is merely an average person, and the action of the play—it's allegorical—takes place in his interior. The greatest tragedies in life occur in one's insides; you know that, I'm sure. The inside drama is almost untouched. It's the subjective drama. It's a great field. . . . The stage has at first a dark-red plush setting, but there will be scenes where the artistic effect will be cubist in inspiration.”

“Inside of John Smith,” Miss Thornton murmured uneasily, and turned to face Michael.

"You mustn't do that," Michael said, "or I can't tell it. When you look at me I begin to think of something else. . . . Yes, now, that's better. Thank you."

"Inside of John Smith," Miss Thornton repeated dully. "Really, it sounds like one of those German films. I—I doubt if it would do. Is that the title: Inside of John Smith?"

"No, that isn't the title—that's where the action takes place. We'd think up a good title, naturally. . . . Well, Miss Thornton, the first character to enter is Cocktail. He's a gay little chap, dressed in yellow silk tights, with a red cap . . . that's the cherry. Cocktail has the stage to himself for awhile. He recites a monologue of optimism—on the screen this could be shown in captions—then he turns handsprings, and when he gets tired of that, he begins playing with the various handles and push-buttons around the room.

"In one of his pranks he slides back a panel, and then he sees—and the audience sees, too—that Virtuous Inclination has been on the stage the whole time. Cocktail looks at her timidly. She is a demure little wisp, with large eyes and a face like Madge Kennedy's. Cocktail is abashed for a moment; then he starts to cut up again. Pretty soon he tells a joke that sets Virtuous Inclination to laughing. Thereupon, he comes up close to her and tickles her in the ribs. She slaps his face——"

"It's rather coarse, isn't it?" Miss Thornton commented, doubtfully.

"No, it isn't coarse at all. It's a philosophical allegory. . . . In fooling around, Cocktail pushes a button accidentally—a door in the wall opens—and in steps Courage.

This player is a huge, two-fisted chap in a brown doublet and tights. He has a swaggering air and a deep voice. . . . Courage is all for throwing Virtuous Inclination out of the window forthwith, but while they are arguing about it Seven-Course Dinner walks on the stage."

"Seven-Course Dinner!" Miss Thornton's hand, flashing with diamonds, went feebly to her forehead, and she closed her eyes—Emotion No. 15. "Is that really a character? Seven-Course Dinner?" Michael saw that her mind was slow in evoking images.

"Surely. Why not? He's a pleasant fellow. Very fat, with a ruddy face. He doesn't walk—he waddles. He wears a tray of salad for a hat—there are great opportunities for a striking costume here—and he has on a soup-and-pastry suit——"

"What's that?" Miss Thornton asked.

"I really don't know how it should be worked out. A soup-and-pastry suit. It's a question for the decorators. . . . Well, he's good-humored and he stops the row. Virtuous Inclination rewards him with a smile.

"Seven-Course Dinner goes laughing around the stage, asking where Love is. He mistakes Virtuous Inclination for Love, but she gravely shakes her head. Then Cocktail volunteers to find Love and disappears, turning somersaults. While he is gone, Courage, Seven-Course Dinner and Virtuous Inclination hold a three-cornered conversation. . . . Now, Cocktail returns with Love. She is exquisitely beautiful—in the screen version you will be Love—and she carries a wand. Her robe is of some soft, shimmery stuff, and there is a silver star on her forehead. Well—she glides in and sits on a throne covered with blue velvet spangled with

golden stars. . . . Virtuous Inclination catches a glimpse of Love and silently steals away.

“Now, while Seven-Course Dinner is chucking Love under the chin, here comes Chronic Dyspepsia——”

“*Oh, my God!*” said Miss Thornton. (This was a natural emotion, not on the numbered chart.)

“—and a feeling of gloom envelops all the characters. Chronic Dyspepsia is a little, querulous old man, bent with age and wearing a long black cloak. He walks with a heavy cane, which goes tap—tap—as he passes across the stage, muttering and complaining. . . . Suddenly the lights go out and there’s a scream. Only a second, and the lights flash on again. There standing in the center of the stage is Mistake——”

“Mistake?” Miss Thornton interrupts, her lovely eyes filled with interrogation. “What mistake?”

“Just Mistake—in general. He’s a foolish fellow, clad in a crazy patchwork of garments, and is shivering with speechless fright. Love, and the other characters, look at him—their eyes distended with fear. ‘What is it?’ Courage demands in a loud voice. ‘Speak, or I’ll brain you.’ The poor fellow cannot speak—his jaws move hysterically without giving a sound. His knees shake and he points toward the door, where at that instant there enters——”

“Oh, wait—*wait*,” cried Miss Thornton desperately. “Wait until I can collect my senses before you tell me what enters.”

Michael politely paused a moment, and then resumed his narrative. “Mistake’s face is livid, his voice fails him, he points with a trembling finger. At that moment there enters Dose of Arsenic——”

"Oh, Mr. Webb—Mr. Webb!" Miss Thornton exclaimed.

"Yes. Dose of Arsenic. He is clothed in a curious quivering garment of bright green with red tassels floating from his head like tongues of flame. His eyes are wild, and he hisses inarticulately. The air is electric with apprehension. 'Keep away from him!' screams Love, terror-stricken. 'Keep away from him!' Dose of Arsenic runs madly around the stage, tearing at the decorations, and striking the characters with his fists. There's a momentary panic. . . . Courage leaps forward bravely, but falls in a dead faint.

"Then Chronic Dyspepsia comes to the front with his stick uplifted. Love covers her face with her hands. 'Don't be afraid,' Chronic Dyspepsia calls out in his tremulous old voice, 'don't be afraid. I'll soon drive him away.' The old man lays his stick lustily across the shoulders of Dose of Arsenic, his thin arms rising and falling like a flail as he belabors the intruder. . . . You, as Love, sit on your throne—your body leaning slightly forward, your eyes wide open, your left hand raised to your cheek, and your right hand on your heart—just as you were a minute ago—"

"No. 26," Miss Thornton murmured under her breath.

"The curtain goes down with Dose of Arsenic being driven off the stage by Chronic Dyspepsia. . . . That's the first act. What d'you think of it?"

"Please, Mr. Webb—please," she said, gathering up her book and preparing to rise. "Please don't write scenarios."

"You think I'd disrupt the movie industry if I should go in for scenario-writing?"

"No." She shook her head gravely and rose. "But you might get yourself into very, very serious trouble. I shall

never say a word about it. I promise you that. Please don't write scenarios"—she laid her hand gently on his arm—"if you do I'm sure something will happen. . . . Go in for something else. The motion picture profession is very exciting, and will not do you any good."

"I see you don't like my play, Miss Thornton"—Michael stood up—"but you've heard only one act. It has a happy ending. Really and truly. The hero comes in; he makes love to you beautifully; it's the old, old story of mated souls, with a skyline kiss as the light slowly dies away and the orchestra leader gets out *The Stars and Stripes Forever* for the navy scene in the news film. Won't you hear the rest of it?"

"No—not now, my dear—dear Mr. Webb"—she gave him her hand, and he saw that there were tears in her eyes—"and please don't let yourself get worked up. Whatever happens, just keep cool. Oh, I'm so sorry for you."

Michael ran after her on a sudden impulse. "I thought I'd ask you, Miss Thornton, if you think playing a few holes of golf would be too exciting for one in my condition," he inquired breathlessly.

"Why no, Mr. Webb, I should think not," she replied with a fine shade of pity in her expression. "The great outdoors, you know, and the air and sunshine; all that would do you good."

He watched her walk across the lawn, a graceful living thing of warmth, and shimmers, and gleams.

4

"The moonlight of forgotten seas
Dwells in your eyes . . ."

Michael thought of these lines of Richard Le Gallienne as he tried to watch the tennis game, and finally gave it up on account of inability to concentrate his attention on what the players were doing. "The moonlight of forgotten seas. . . ." He was impressionable. He had the capacity for loving a woman without admiring her. This is the true test of the Great Lover, established long ago in that golden-hearted time. And he had within him the willingness to love a woman one day and forget her the next. And he had within him the fortitude to be loved by a woman, and then be forgotten by her, without troubling overmuch. And he had within him the capacity for loving three or four women, all at the same time, and loving each with an undivided affection. This last is an art truly lost. At one time it was known to men now dead and gone, especially to the gentlemen of Florence, and is mentioned definitely by Boccaccio as having been practiced in his day. A lost art, like the secret of the Tyrian purple or the deft-cunning of malleable glass. Michael Webb felt that, if put to the test, he would be able to revive it.

5

That afternoon Michael and Richard Ellerman motored out to the golf club. The great financier played golf with a vicious intensity. He seemed to look upon the inoffensive guttapercha pill as upon a personal enemy, and he slashed

at it without mercy. At almost every stroke he cut too low under the ball and lifted a divot, which was carefully replaced by a patient caddy.

"My son can beat me hands down at this game," he told Michael Webb. They had raced fiercely from the first tee to the fifth hole, and this was the first sentence Richard Ellerman had uttered, other than a few muttered imprecations at bunkers and lost balls. "He's a complete failure at everything else, my son is. But he's a good golfer. You've played with him, haven't you?"

"Oh, yes," Michael replied. "I've played with him. He is a marvelously fine golf player . . . *you* play too fast, for one thing."

"Do I? I suppose I do. When I go at anything I like to get it done and over."

"Well, I'm not a Jim Barnes myself," Michael continued. "I'm a philosopher by trade, you know, and they are not skillful at outdoor sports."

"They're said to be wonderful at indoor sports," Richard Ellerman said with a cackling laugh. "Better than almost everybody else," he added enigmatically as he knelt down and carefully laid his ball on a tiny cone of sand. With almost painful attention he studied the white sphere as it stood on its silly little mound, and brushed away a few grains of sand that lay in front of it. Then he eyed it again and made over the cone of sand. "Tee's too high," he murmured.

All symptoms of a rotten golfer, Michael thought.

Straightening up, Ellerman glanced at Michael and inquired, "Are you a journeyman philosopher or just an apprentice? That's what I want to know."

"Oh, I'm a journeyman. I've served my term as an apprentice, and am prepared now to philosophize on any subject at a moment's notice. I undertake repairs, too. If your philosophical system is out of whack, I'll fix it for you. And I'll de-bunk you, too—for a suitable fee."

"You can't de-bunk me," his companion remarked. "I've always avoided bunk. I'm a plain, simple man and speak right out, and——"

"You're one in a thousand," Michael interrupted.

Ellerman slowly raised his driver and came down on the ball with a terrific slam, and sent it slicing far to the right.

"Oh, hell," he muttered. "Look at that! That happened because I thought of something else just as I was making the drive."

At the tenth hole he suddenly decided to quit playing. His interest in the game dropped into oblivion like a stone dropping into a well. Turning his putter over to the caddy he started abruptly toward the club house, talking to Michael on the way about the popularity of the Ellerman car, its ever-expanding sales record, and his drive for business in foreign countries.

"By the way, your friend Hunter is a bright young man," he remarked. "He has been with the company several years, but I've never had much talk with him until the other day. I presume he has told you something about his plan for the company to make and sell its own storage batteries—hasn't he?"

My friend Hunter! Michael had met him only once before he came to Shadow Lawn, but he thought it unnecessary to say so. "He told me a little about it. Not much."

"Well, you're a philosopher by trade, and I wish you'd

philosophize about that a little, and tell me what I ought to do."

Michael smiled. "You've already made up your mind about it, and I positively decline to turn on the current to throw light on a question that's already settled. Do you know how much it costs in depreciation, breakage, and fixed charges every time I philosophize?"

"How do you know I've already decided about it?" Ellerman asked in a cold, snarling tone without a trace of the joviality that had kept him smiling for the past quarter of an hour.

"Because you decide everything that comes up in five minutes," Michael said in his most matter-of-fact manner. "Before you had known me five minutes you decided that I wasn't worth a damn."

Despite his habitual self-possession Richard Ellerman was taken aback by the brutal frankness of this observation. "Well, I—I—, well, are you?" he stammered. "*Are you worth a damn? You can't beat me in frankness, you see?*" . . . A sudden liking for Michael Webb arose within him, and in an instant he was wondering if he could find a place for him in the company.

"You couldn't think of a more foolish question to ask me, or anybody else, if you gave the rest of your life to the task," Michael replied good-humoredly. "At the bottom, every man has a good opinion of himself, in spite of anything he may say to the contrary. If he didn't have, he couldn't endure his own existence. I'll bet that even you have a pretty good opinion of yourself."

Ellerman's cheerfulness returned. He wanted to own this independent, outspoken person. He glanced at Michael

with admiration and placed his hand on his shoulder. "I need a man like you, and I need him badly. How would you like to be a vice-president of the Ellerman Company?"

"I feel tremendously complimented, and all that," Michael answered, "but it wouldn't work out well. It wouldn't really. There's so much bunk lying around that I'd be dangerous."

"Oh, come, come," said the motor car magnate, "don't be so instantaneous. Reflect over it; take your time. I'm offering you a pretty big thing."

They walked on toward the club house in silence. As they reached the verandah Richard Ellerman tapped Michael's chest with his finger and said slowly, "Now look here. There is a lot of bunk lying around the Ellerman Motor Car Company . . . you're right about that. I know it as well as you do, and I'm opposed to it as much as you are. . . . My idea is that you and I together could clean it up and get rid of it."

Michael shook his head and made no reply. As Ellerman disappeared into his dressing room our philosopher turned sadly away and murmured, "What's the use?"

6

While Michael Webb and his host were on the golf course Miss Fanny Thornton was in her room, seated at a rosewood desk, writing her daily letter to her chum.

Miss Thornton had never really loved anyone, except, of course, dear mama and her brothers and sisters—though she talked about love a good deal, and pretended to understand it.

In her innermost heart she did not believe there was such a thing as romantic love; it was all play-acting. People got married to have a family and a home, and they invented the fiction of love to make it all appear more charming. She explained—to herself—the devastating tragedies of the heart of which one read in the newspapers by the plausible theory that these men and women had lost their minds, and took the play-acting in earnest.

Though Miss Thornton did not believe in love, she did believe in intimate friendships. She knew how one could adore a chum. Her own chum was Katherine Henderley, in faraway Los Angeles. In letters of the starkest realism they wrote to each other every day. She was thrilled by the thought that five of her letters were now on their way to Kitty, and five of Kitty's were on their way to her. She could see them in her mind, crossing the continent, little white messengers—each one a day behind the other.

She turned a page and wrote—"to meet dear Blanche. She is not dear to me like you, dearest, but she is so lovely, and an artist to her finger tips. I want you to meet all the people I know—when I see a new face I say to myself, well, now what would Kitty think of you?"

"This Mr. Webb I mentioned yesterday is a writer, tho' I don't know what novels. He tried to tell me today about a scenario he was going to write. I asked him to when he mentioned that he had one, tho' for the life of me I don't know now why I asked him. It was just one of those things that come up in conversation. Oh, Kitty, what a scenario!!! Really and truly I was frightened, tho' that was foolish, for he's a perfect gentleman, and such lovely manners.

“His ideas are so strange! One of the characters in his scenario is called Liver Complaint, and it all takes place in a man’s insides. Kitty, can you imagine such a thing!! He said it was a subjective drama. He’s plain crazy. I suspected that, so I turned around to look in his face—you can always tell by people’s eyes—and what do you suppose he said! He said, ‘Miss Thornton, please look the other way, I can’t tell it while you’re looking at me.’ The poor fellow knows what’s wrong, and didn’t want to reveal his secret. A pity, too, because he’s a perfect gentleman.”

Chapter Twelve

Bingo Drops Into Poetry

I

THOMAS HOUGHTON HUNTER was lounging about the wide Tudor hall when Bingo Ellerman strolled in. It was about eleven o'clock in the morning. "Ah, there," he called out cheerily to Hunter. "How's every little thing this morning?"

"Pretty fine, Mr. Ellerman," Hunter answered. "How's yourself?" He took in Bingo's clothes with a glance of admiration—an easy-fitting suit of fine dark-blue cloth with Jermyn Street, St. James, written invisibly all over it.

"Say, I didn't catch your name the other day," Bingo said. "Munter, Gunter—which was it? Are you an actor, or a poet, or something?"

"No, Mr. Ellerman," Hunter replied, with a smile. "I haven't the honor to be either an actor or a poet. I'm a little too practical, I guess." He took a thin, monogrammed leather case from his pocket and proceeded to extract a card.

At that moment Miss Fanny Thornton passed through the hall, with her gray and blue volume of *As You Like It* in her hand. Bingo's manner became that of a flower-garden in the sunshine.

"Oh, how-de-do, Miss Thornton," he said effusively. "Beautiful morning, isn't it?"

"How do you do, Junior," she uttered in a tone of frigid politeness, and passed on without turning her head.

Hunter gazed at this encounter in astonishment. Although he had read a little of Bingo's exploits in the newspapers he had no real idea of the powerful reputation of this combination of Casanova and comedian.

Bingo followed Miss Thornton hungrily with his eyes, "Stuck-up little piece, isn't she?" he remarked to Hunter. "A swell looker. You say you're not an actor or a poet. How did you horn in, then?"

"I didn't horn in, Mr. Ellerman," Hunter answered. "I'm not in the habit of forcing myself on people. Perhaps that card"—he put his business card in the blonde giant's fist—"will give you an idea of my standing, and why I am here." As he handed over the card he made a little ceremonious bow.

Bingo looked at the rectangle of cardboard and read in a slow, measured tone: "Thomas Houghton Hunter, Vice-President Ellerman Motor Car Company. Is that your name?" he demanded.

"That's my name and position," Hunter replied.

"Thom-as Hought-on Hunt-er," Bingo repeated. He held the card in his left hand and beat time with his right. "Why, you can put it to music!" he exclaimed. "Did you ever think of that? No, you never did. . . . Don't you tell me you did. You know I thought of it first. For the love of—say, you ought to have a line printed right there"—he pointed to the bottom of the card—"Try this on your slide trombone. Lots of people would do it——"

"I—uh—I——" Hunter stammered, his eyes full of hot anger.

"Wait, wait, *wait*," Bingo put his hand on Hunter's shoulder in a friendly fashion. "Don't interrupt me, 'cause my mind's at work. Lessee, now——

Thomas Houghton Hunter
 Made a carburetor;
 And found it wouldn't do.
 So he made it better—
 Did Thomas Houghton Hunter——

"Now, I'm stuck. Got to get something that rhymes with *do*. Grew—crew—stew—you think of something. Don't stand there looking so sour. . . . Oh, I got it! Flew—that's it——

And then it fairly flew.

How's *that*? No, that isn't so good, after all. Carburetors don't fly. . . . Well, I'll leave it with you. You can polish it up."

Hunter's fingers shook as he took the card out of Bingo's hand. Tearing it into pieces, he threw them on the floor and turned away.

"Hey, there," Bingo called after him, "there's no use being so huffy over it. If I'd known you were going to act like that I wouldn't have played with you at all. Come on and make one up about me. I can give you some dope for a hot one."

Hunter walked out on the terrace without replying. . . .

Richard Ellerman, Sr., came slowly down the stairs. Bingo saw him and picked up the scraps of paper. "Look here, Dad"—he showed the piece of cardboard to his

father—"you'd better get after that Hunter person. He's destroying the company's assets."

As they stood together, anyone would have noticed the resemblance between the young man and his father. The same shape of head, the same colour of eyes—and the most striking feature—a similarity of physical motion. The senior Ellerman looked sternly at his son, but there was an unextinguishable sparkle of amusement in his eyes. "What's all this?" he demanded.

"Why, vice-president Hunter is tearing up his cards and throwing them away"—he ran his fingers over the lettering on one of the scraps—"it's engraved, too. I'll bet it cost at least two cents in quantity lots. You ought to report him to the economy department. Of course, it's a small matter, but a penny saved is a penny gained. I'm always looking out for things like that."

"What did you say to Mr. Hunter to cause him to do that?"

"I didn't say anything—hardly," Bingo replied. "Something about carburetors. Lessee. I believe I said—kind of off-hand—that it was a fine day for carburetors. Then he tore up his card and threw it away, and disappeared through that door there with a yell of rage. He doesn't like carburetors. Maybe he has had a lot of carburetor trouble."

"Let me tell you something, young man," Richard Ellerman said emphatically, "I will not allow you to tease and make fun of people in my house. You may do that somewhere else, but not here. Go out at once, find Mr. Hunter; and tell him you're sorry—for whatever it was."

"Yes, sir, I'll do it right now," Bingo said. There was

an unusual air of meekness about him. His father walked away rapidly to hide the smile that he couldn't repress any longer.

Hunter stood on the terrace, with his hands in his pockets, looking gloomily over the vista of countryside. Bingo touched him on the arm. . . . "I've been thinking it over, Mr. Hunter," he began, "and I want to say that I'm sorry. . . . I'm sorry you tore up your card and threw it away. I've brought you back the pieces."

He put the scraps of paper in Hunter's hand, and walked down the steps and across the lawn, whistling to a dog that came bounding after him.

2

"Now if he had wanted to insult me, why didn't he speak up in a manly way and say so?" Hunter blurted out to Michael Webb. He had seen Michael reading on the lawn, and with the itching desire for a confidant that comes with sudden anger, he had poured out the story of Bingo Ellerman and his rhyme about the carburetor, and the incident of the torn-up card.

"Play my name on a saxophone," the young man continued, with a look of stiff and conscious indignation. "That's what he said. Well, my name isn't Ellerman, but it's as good as his, and I'll tell him so. Going about insulting people!"

"No, Hunter, he wasn't trying to insult you," Michael said. "It was nothing but a joke; he's a born joker."

"All he's got to do to find out who I am is to ask his father. Just let him ask him. Joke, eh?"

"Yes; that's all it was. A joke. That's all."

"That's a pretty poor way for a man to joke with a person he doesn't know. That's all I've got to say."

"Yes, it's out of taste; but don't blame him too much for that. There are lots of things dreadfully out of taste that we manage to put up with."

Hunter dug irascibly in the grass with the point of his shoe. "I don't want to stay in this house another day," he said. "I spoke to him as one gentleman speaks to another. I've . . ."

"Look here," Michael exclaimed, and pushed a wicker chair toward the young man. "Sit down, and listen. You want to get along with these people here, don't you?"

"Yes, I do—but I'll not sacrifice my self-respect to get along with anybody."

"Well, you're probably turning out a larger volume of self-respect than the occasion requires," Michael went on. "Now, I'll give you some really sound dope. . . . People of this type—all of them here—people of this type anywhere—often have a latent strain of fierce deviltry. They're the buccaneers of the modern world. I'm not saying this in disparagement. Personally, I like the modern buccaneer, though I do think his value as a national asset is doubtful.

"Then, in addition to that, they're bored to death. So they run easily into moods of horseplay and persiflage, and irregular love-affairs, and comedy generally. Now, unless you fall into that spirit you're out of place here, really. I'm frank, you see."

"Oh, I want you to be frank," Hunter, said cordially. "Maybe I did take it too seriously. I'm sorry now I got mad over it. But I'll not apologize—no, sir—I'll not——"

"Apologize!" Michael exclaimed. "Why, my dear boy, if you should apologize to him, he'd think you a mere worm. No! Don't be foolish. Do you want me to tell you how to handle this momentous problem?"

"Yes, what would you do?"

"Do precisely as I tell you, and you'll find that the situation will clear up wonderfully. The next time you see Mr. Richard Ellerman, Jr., just stand still and bark at him—*bow-wow-wow*—and do it loud, like this"—Michael barked like a dog, and Hunter laughed—"bark at him, no matter where you are, or whoever may be around."

"But suppose he's with his father—or with one of the ladies?"

"Then bark louder than ever. . . . No, I'm not stringing you. You can trust me. . . . Then, he'll say something. I don't know what he'll say, and it doesn't make any difference. As soon as he speaks, you come right back and say: *Gee, I was rotten, my darling.*"

"Oh, I couldn't say anything as silly as that," Hunter asserted.

"Yes, you can say it, for it's not as foolish as it sounds. I can't tell you why. It's a matter of rather deep psychology. Just do that, and keep rattling along in the same strain—and in an hour you and he will be like two old school chums."

"I would like to be friendly with him," Hunter said, "but I don't want to make a fool of myself."

"Well, you can't be friendly with him without making a fool of yourself."

"All right," Hunter said, "I'll do it."

"That's right. You do it. By the way, if you haven't

anything to do this afternoon, we might take a walk," Michael suggested, and rose to go into the house.

"Sure," Hunter said, immensely pleased. "You're just the man I'd like to discuss things with."

3

"I'm glad of this opportunity to have a good long talk with you," said Thomas Hunter, as he and Michael strolled after luncheon along the elm-shaded lane that runs from the village to the Ellerman estate. "It's not often that I get a chance to exchange ideas with anybody who has ever done any really big thinking."

"Well, you've come to the right place," said Michael. "I've done some whopping big thinking."

"I know it," Hunter solemnly consented.

Beyond the low stone wall to the left there was a glimpse of the distant lazy Hudson slipping through its gateway of hills; overhead, the majestic curve of a blue-and-ivory sky. A beady-eyed, bushy-tailed chipmunk followed them, with timid advances, along the top of the crumbling wall.

"Let's sit down by the side of the road here," Michael said, pointing to a grassy bank along-side the wall. "We'll sit down and have a talk. . . . Wait a minute." He crossed the lane with his pocket-knife in his hand and came back presently with a straight piece of stick about ten inches long. "While we're talking," he explained, "I'll whittle a telling-stick."

"A telling-stick? What's that?" Hunter asked, as he sat down and leaned back against the wall.

"It's a miniature totem pole. I learned how to make them

while I was among the Tlinklat Indians. They cut the legends of their tribe on these telling-sticks. It's all told in symbols—birds, people, snakes, and so on." He held up the round piece of wood and looked at it critically. "This will make a good one," he added.

Whittling a stick was, according to Hunter's point of view, a most human thing for a philosopher to do, and it made him feel that Michael Webb was, after all, a companionable person as well as a stupendous intellect.

"I've pulled off a little stunt since I saw you last," Hunter said eagerly. "Something that ought to help."

Michael ceased his wood-carving and listened attentively. The young vice-president of the Ellerman Motor Car Company drew a half-dozen yellow telegrams from his inside pocket and spread them on the grass. "Last evening I sent a wire to all the department heads of the production and sales divisions at Chicago," he explained, "and said this"—with his forefinger he went through the motion of writing on the ground—"I wired: *You are familiar with my plan for company to produce its own batteries. Wire your opinion for me to show the chief. Should we make and sell our own batteries or not?* These are the answers. Gee! They're great! Look at this one. Here's old Jeff Pilcher—in charge of the assembling department ever since Rover was a pup. He says: *Emphatically yes. The batteries we get now are rotten and only last six months. My regards to the chief.* And here's one from the head of the electrical department; he's kind of sore because it's in his department, and he thinks I went out of my way to study up this proposal, but he doesn't knock it. He says: *Idea is sound, and I do not disapprove provided the batteries are made under super-*

vision of electrical department. They're pretty good, eh? And I have four more of the same kind. Well, Mr. Ellerman can't very well go against the combined opinion of his department heads."

"Why not?" Michael asked.

"We-ell, he could, of course; but I don't believe he would—unless he has some very strong reason."

"I think he has already decided about the matter," Michael said. "It will not do any harm to show him your telegrams, but they will not affect his decision."

Hunter was startled, and showed it in his manner. "Decided already," he exclaimed. "How do you know? Did he tell you? Decided how?"

"No, he didn't tell me . . . my logic tells me. His mind is intolerant of delay; he is intensely impatient by nature; he decides everything almost instantly. . . ." Michael paused and reflected, as if searching for some clear manner of expression. "Don't you see that if he were going to decide against your plan he would have done it the other day when you first explained it to him. He would have said *No* flatly—he likes to say *No*, a characteristic of all successful financiers—or he would have referred you to somebody else and told them to tell you *No*. . . . But he didn't do either of these things, and consequently I have the conviction that he has some clear-cut course of procedure of his own, and the approval of your plan is a great part of it. I——"

"I'm pleased to hear you say that, and I only hope you're right. Pardon my interruption."

"There's a nigger in the woodpile somewhere," Michael continued. "That's just my inference because of the con-

ference that he has arranged to have with the consulting electrical engineer—whoever it may be. The Ellerman Company is chock-full of expert knowledge—therefore, why a conference with somebody on the outside about a matter which is so——”

“I’ve wondered at that, too,” said Hunter, mystified, “but, of course, a man like the chief has his own peculiar ways. He’s subtle.”

“No,” Michael shook his head. “He’s not subtle; he’s simple. There’s a profound difference between subtlety and simplicity, but they look very much alike on the surface. The subtle mind exposes everything but its aim; the simple mind, on the contrary, reveals its aim but confuses everything else. Richard Ellerman’s aim is to make money, and he always goes toward it in the simplest and most direct manner. . . . We are so accustomed to indirection, vagueness and muddle that the direct, straight-line way of doing things puzzles us. . . . Now it is as clear to me as daylight that he is interested in your proposition, and intends to make some money out of it. But how? . . . I don’t know enough about the business to be able to judge accurately the most direct road to profit in this particular idea.”

“Well, I can tell you that,” Hunter broke in eagerly. “The plan I proposed, if carried out, will give the Ellerman Company a very large annual profit. That’s the most direct way to go about it.”

“It may be. I don’t know. If I were you——” Michael hesitated. “This is really none of my business,” he added, and began to work again on the stick in his hand.

“But if you were I,” Hunter insisted, “what would you do?”

"Here's what I'd do, if you want to know," Michael began. "In the first place, Richard Ellerman will either approve your plan or disapprove it. If he turns it down, you're no worse off—and no better off—than you were before. . . . But if he approves it—and, of course, that's what you want—then your uncertainty begins. I think he has already decided to approve it——"

"I don't see where the uncertainty comes in, then," Hunter remarked.

"The uncertainty lies in the strong probability that he has some other plan in his mind that he has not revealed. A plan of which this is the first step. Take this consulting engineer. . . . Ellerman is not bringing him here to get advice. Not at all. He doesn't need advice. He's bringing him into the thing to listen. He wants that man to hear your story at first hand."

"Oh, you think——"

"Now, in case he adopts your idea, if I were in your place, I would have him signed up in a salary contract for a term of years before I departed for Chicago. Ask for the biggest salary you think you can get, and have it put in black and white."

Hunter reflected gravely. "No, I can't do that," he said after awhile. "I can't do it. It wouldn't seem fair. Mr. Ellerman told me he would look after me in case anything came of it——"

"If anything came of it?" Michael queried. "That's rather vague. Do you know exactly what he meant by the words *if anything came of it?*"

"He said *if anything came of it I would be taken care of by him*. That sounds plain to me. Now, suppose I go and

demand a contract—well, he'll think I have no confidence in him. It looks kind of greedy."

"It would be only business-like," Michael said. "However, it's your affair . . . not mine . . . and every man has to decide such things for himself. The fact is, I see the captain of industry type of man in a different light from you. I'm a philosopher, you know, and philosophers look at things in queer ways."

"Some do, I know," Hunter laughed. "But you're the most human philosopher that ever happened."

"Yes, I'm a human being, all right. Well the big money-getter has a logic of his own. . . . He doesn't look upon men and tools and factories primarily as a means of production; he considers them solely as a means of securing wealth and power. He uses men as a pack of hounds to hunt money, and, provided he gets the money, he doesn't care very much about the hounds."

"Not Mr. Ellerman," exclaimed Hunter. "You don't know him the way we know him in the company. He's constantly doing generous things. One of the men in my department got sick with tuberculosis and the chief heard of it somehow. Well, he sent that man, with his wife and family, to Arizona for two years. Paid every expense. The man was very poor; he couldn't have stopped working a month, but old R. E. took care of him, and he came back cured. He does things like that right along. . . . No, all he does isn't printed, but we know about it. . . . He's a self-made man, and knows how it is not to get a square deal. That was a mighty interesting story he told in the smoking-room the other day, about his early start. Worked his way through college . . . then you remember how he told about

being a time-keeper in a tinplate company, and then starting in a small way as a little private banker. Think of that!"

"I am thinking of it," Michael said. "As a philosopher I have a special license to be peculiar; so now to top off this crop of early recollections, I am going to tell a fable. It's short, and soon over—so listen closely.

"One day a peasant walking along a river bank saw a fox struggling in the water. 'Help, help!' the fox cried. 'The world is coming to an end.'

"'You are mistaken, my friend,' replied the peasant, 'all I can see is one small fox drowning.'"

"Oh . . . is that all?" Hunter said after a moment's silence. "What's the moral?"

"The moral is," Michael answered, "short and easy to remember: *When around deep water watch your step.*"

Chapter Thirteen

Adventures in Reality

I

I'M not going to bore you with my business any more," Hunter said courteously. "I've bothered you with it too much as it is."

"It doesn't bore me at all," Michael answered. "Why should it? On the contrary, it's interesting, and I'm learning a lot."

Hunter hesitated a moment. "I'm not just an ordinary business man, if I do say it myself, Mr. Webb," he remarked timidly. "I'm a good deal of a reader; in fact, my wife says I read too much. I like to talk on philosophical subjects."

"All right. Let's do it. I'm a philosopher with a large and diversified repertoire," Michael said gravely, while measuring the stick with his eye. "I was pinch-hitter at the Atlantic City Philosophic Carnival. You know what that means."

"I'd like to ask you what you consider the greatest discovery ever made by man," Hunter began, "and I'll tell you why I happened to think of that question. I read once in Draper's *Intellectual Development of Europe* that he—I mean Dr. Draper—thought the domestication of the dog

and the discovery of the use of fire were the greatest forward steps ever made by primitive man. That set my mind to work, and—well, at that time I was a member of a Saturday Night Debating Society at Winnetka, so I proposed a similar question to the society. I put this problem to them: *What is the greatest discovery ever made by man, considered from the standpoint of its effect upon civilization.*

“Well, sir, that debate occupied us for two or three months, and finally got in the newspapers. They published letters from readers about it every day. Some said the electric light, others the sewing machine, others the steam engine, others the telescope. I remember one man argued for the motion picture—it would preserve scenes for future generations. What d’you suppose received the largest number of readers’ votes.”

Michael shook his head. “That’s a hard question,” he said. “The steam engine?”

“No, sir. . . . The art of printing,” the young man replied. “That was the verdict. Don’t you think, from your standpoint as an author and philosopher, that they were pretty nearly right? What is your opinion, Mr. Webb? You must have given this question some thought.”

“I’ve given it a lot of thought. I hate to disagree with your literary symposium, but——”

“Well, what do you think?” Hunter eagerly inquired. “The discovery of electricity received the second largest vote. What, in your judgment, is the world’s most important discovery?”

“I think the greatest discovery ever made,” said Michael slowly, “is that a jackass will keep on walking straight ahead if you tie a bundle of hay three feet in front of his nose.”

Hunter thought this was a joke and started to laugh at it. Then he caught Michael's serious expression, and his feeling of amusement was replaced by one of bewilderment. . . . He had never had any practical experience with live-stock, but he remembered having read that peasants sometimes tie a bundle of hay before the noses of the donkeys to induce them to keep going on. What this had to do with human progress he could not imagine.

"Are you really serious?" he asked.

"Certainly," Michael answered. "I see you don't realize the tremendous importance of this invention. You will, in time, if you think about it. . . . I don't know who made this discovery. His name has long since been lost in the desert of time, but his invention remains to this hour without an equal among the great treasures of the human intellect."

"Great in what way?" asked Hunter, with a sense of mental confusion.

"In every way," Michael said. "How would the massive brains and stuffed shirts manage the world without the bundle of hay? Take it away, and chaos would ensue throughout civilization. No," he chuckled, "the bundle of hay is very important—most important."

"I see what you mean," was Hunter's comment. "There's some good philosophy in it, though it sounds like a joke. The bundle of hay, you mean, is the reward for faithful service."

"Well, not exactly the *reward* for faithful service," Michael laughed. "I should call it the *inducement* to faithful service. Occasionally some obstreperous jackass is given his bundle of hay, but in a general way it is kept dangling be-

fore his nose. Experience has shown that to be the better method."

"I wish I had known about this discovery when we had our debate. I would have put a little humor in our discussion."

Michael smiled and bent over his wood-carving. "You'll know about it the next time," he remarked.

"Yes, I will. You're a strange philosopher," Hunter said, gazing at Michael with admiration.

"Oh, yes. I'm stranger than Emerson and Herbert Spencer. Self-starters hadn't been invented in their day, and they had to be cranked up. My philosophy is automatic. A child can use it."

"At dinner the other evening you said a good deal about reality. Awfully interesting, I thought it was."

"Well, yes. Reality is usually interesting," was Michael's brief comment.

"Truth is stranger than fiction, eh?" Hunter said laughingly.

"Oh, it's incredibly strange, and must be taken in small doses—at the start. Large doses sometimes produce convulsions."

"That so?" Hunter said in a tone of curiosity. "I'm not afraid of it. Can you recommend a book based on reality? I'll read it."

"You're a rash young man," Michael remarked, and Hunter began to have a suspicion that he was dealing with a nut. "There are a good many books full of reality, but one doesn't run across them every day. Lemme see, now. . . . Lemme see. I'll . . . think of one in a moment. . . . Well, as a beginning you might try *Imperial Washington*,

by Ex-Senator R. F. Pettigrew. A book about national politics and some of our leading men."

"Ex-Senator Pettigrew?" queried Hunter. "I believe I've heard of him."

"I suppose you have. He was a Senator from South Dakota. You like success-books, I'm sure. *Imperial Washington* tells how to attain success. Shows the methods, you know."

"That's what I like," Hunter agreed. "I suppose I can get it at any book-store?"

"Well, *hardly*. . . . But, of course, any bookseller can order it for you."

2

Hunter had read many books, but had never before met anyone who wrote them. In these days of destructive criticism, when hardly any class, even the most respectable, is safe from irresponsible mud-slinging, and all substantial values are set at naught, it is refreshing to observe Hunter's reverence for men of letters. In his mind he saw the powerful intellects of philosophers, historians and economists hovering over the world, unmoved by ordinary motives, and thinking—*thinking*. . . .

Though he was a voracious reader, he had no taste for the adenoidal fiction of the hour. He went in for the better stuff, and had bored straight through a list of One Hundred Best Books handed out by a Chicago Library Committee. All venom had been extracted from this list, and it was guaranteed to be aseptic. It began with Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding* and ended with *The Crime of*

Sylvester Bonnard. When he finished it he realized, with a thrill of pride, but without a trace of undue egotism, that he was at last a well-read man.

His innate quality of manliness, and his sense of simplicity, kept him from being a fluff, but he was nevertheless a well-read ignoramus, with a mind composed of mental fly-paper. He considered American civilization God's masterpiece; and our mechanical ingenuity the admiration and envy of all foreign tribes. In fact, his outlook was almost as bland and as free from ideas as that of Vice-President Calvin Coolidge.

The mental equipment of the average, educated, unthinking, middle-class American is perhaps the weirdest product in the history of human thought. The great ignoramuses of the past were plain fools—people deficient in brains—but here we have millions of bright-eyed, alert ignoramuses whose minds, through some subtle legerdemain of American life, have become filled with trash and dead leaves.

They are surrounded by thought-forms built up of unrealities—thought-forms permeated with fatigue strains and threatening to collapse.

At Shadow Lawn Hunter was not at his best, for he was awed by the careless magnificence of wealth and confused by its attendant levity and idleness. He had imagined that life among people to whom a million dollars is no great matter would be a stately affair, and he had come prepared to be dignified, reserved and weighty. A cross between a levee at the Court at St. James and a meeting of the directors of the United States Steel Corporation was what he fancied their social life would be.

To his surprise he found that, obviously, none of these

people had ever read the One Hundred Best Books or Dr. Eliot's Five-Foot Shelf. They were even strangely ignorant of the world's happenings as recorded in the daily newspapers. In business matters they did not speak his language, for he thought in terms of productivity and they thought in terms of investment. They knew very little about the prices of raw materials, or the cost of processes, or the wages of labor—but even the women among them knew the prices of stocks. And they understood many forms of amusement and sport, not in a foggy, desultory way—but with precision and authority.

3

“What in your opinion is the most important quality in business, Mr. Webb?” Hunter asked, after a short pause. He was not certain that he would ever have another chance to chat with the celebrated philosopher and de-bunking specialist, and he made up his mind to make the most of his present opportunity.

“Salesmanship,” Michael replied promptly as he cut the oval eyes of some mythical chief on the stick. “Salesmanship, by all odds! Without sales there is nothing in business at all. . . . It evaporates.”

“How about the great question of production?” Hunter came back. “Isn't the making of goods more important than the selling of them?”

“I'll ask you your own question,” Michael said. “Do you think anybody would make goods if he couldn't sell them?”

“No, I don't think anybody would, but in reality the world

could get along without salesmen, but it couldn't get along without producers."

Michael smiled. "Of course the world could get along without salesmen, but business couldn't. Business is organized only for profit."

"For service, too," Hunter insisted. "It renders a service to the people with whom it deals."

"Can you give me the name of any business enterprise that was organized for service and not for profit?" Michael laid down his knife and the telling-stick and awaited the answer.

"Well, no," Hunter finally replied, after a moment's reflection. "I don't think I can, and it really isn't necessary for me to do it, anyway. Business gives a service to society and receives a profit. The two are combined. Its profit is the reward for its service."

"Yes, but let us stick to the point," said Michael. "You asked me what I consider the most important quality in business, and I said salesmanship. I didn't say that business doesn't serve the public. It does, but its service is incidental.

"All business enterprises are organized and conducted for the purpose of making money. That's why the business man is in business. . . . I don't blame him for that. He's obliged to make money out of society—his customers. How? Why, by selling as much as he can, at prices as high as his customers will stand. To increase sales he creates, through costly and subtle advertising, new desires on the part of the public. In fact, his whole scheme, from start to finish, is an organized attack on society. It has to be. No other conception of business is possible.

"Under these circumstances, salesmanship is absolutely

indispensable. Salesmen are the shock troops of business in its war on society."

"Its war on society!" Hunter exclaimed. "I don't understand you."

"You can, if you look upon business as an anti-social force, which it is in reality. I might as well say right now that I don't consider the business man himself responsible for this. He's no more responsible than the rest of us. Business was here before he came. Might as well blame you and me for the Civil War."

"I'm awfully glad to hear you say that," Hunter broke in. "I'm a business man myself, you know. But why do you say that business is at war on society?"

"I'll tell you," Michael continued. "In the first place—at the beginning—we turned over the entire matter of the production and distribution of commodities to private enterprise. Everything you wear, everything you eat, even the coal that heats your house, has been manipulated by somebody who has only his own interest in mind. Your company manufactures cars with the same motive—in fact, it's impossible to transact business any other way. This is individualistic and anti-social in the highest degree.

"But, on the other hand, the development of the practical sciences, the spread of intelligence, the great inventions, the culture of ideas—all these are communistic, co-operative and intrinsically social.

"Now, these two opposing fundamental ideas clash. The result is the violent dualism of modern life. We claim to be one thing while we are really another. We are constantly trying to adjust facts to an idealism which they will not fit. Our national consciousness has become as saturated

with bunk and hypocrisy as a sponge is saturated with water. . . . You see that, don't you?"

"Yes, I see that," Hunter agreed. "You mean that, in the last analysis, every business enterprise is for itself before everything else. That's true. And so you call that anti-social?"

"Well, isn't it? I leave that to you."

"Yes, it is," Hunter assented, "but your conclusion depends a good deal on your definition of the term anti-social. Under your definition labor would be anti-social, too."

"Oh, yes," Michael agreed. "The laboring man is as anxious to get all he can out of society as the capitalist—and he has to be so, and for the same reason."

This ready agreement was surprising to Hunter. He had already come to the conclusion that Michael Webb was a radical. What radicalism is, or what radicals are trying to do, were matters on which he was not informed. Through contact with deft and indirect suggestion for years he had been led to regard the subject as a variety of moral leprosy. So naturally he knew very little about it. He imagined that all radicals consider the laboring man a one hundred per cent altruist, a warm-hearted comrade equipped with all the homely virtues, and the hope of the nation.

"The demands of the labor unions are getting beyond all reason," Hunter continued. "Talk about being anti-social! You'll find it there, all right. I read a speech that Mr. Frank A. Munsey made the other day before the American Bankers' Association, and it impressed me very, very much. . . . Mr. Munsey said something had to be done. He pointed out that carpenters are getting fifteen dollars a day. Think of that! Their labor union is holding people up and making

them pay fifteen dollars a day. This can't continue. He called upon the bankers to save the country——”

“From the carpenters?”

“No. From that kind of extortion—from radicalism generally. Of course, I mean nothing personal——”

“I thought the carpenters were getting more than fifteen dollars a day,” said Michael. “They are not as good business men as I thought they were. What was Mr. Munsey's objection to these wages?”

“A carpenter is obviously not worth fifteen dollars a day,” Hunter replied.

“Why not? If he can get it. Under our system it's expressly understood that a man's worth all he can get. Consider Mr. Munsey. How much does he get? I don't know what his income is—probably several thousand dollars a day. Is he worth it? I don't know, but I would like to hear what the carpenters think about it. I'll bet fifty cents that if the question were voted on by the carpenters, they would decide that Mr. Munsey's value to society is not more than that of two good carpenters. Say, thirty dollars a day, to be liberal.”

Notwithstanding his respect for Michael Webb, as a philosopher and a thinking man, Hunter thought his attitude almost indecent—outrageous—in its lack of respect for the leading spirits of American progress, such as—Mr. Frank A. Munsey. . . . As to the carpenters, he didn't think they contributed much to civilization. So he made no reply. What was there to say?

“All the elements of the industrial system are anti-social,” Michael resumed. “We are running the whole show like a foot-race, or a weight-lifting competition. The prevail-

ing neurosis of our time is the direct result of overstrain in this contest. It is incredibly senseless. As long as men have to stamp each other in the face to make a living, there can be no general cultivation of kindness and beauty in the world."

4

Both men were silent for some time. Hunter searched in the grass for pebbles, and shied them thoughtfully at a nodding dandelion across the road, while Michael worked with minute care on the Indian figures that were beginning to show on the telling-stick.

"Do you think the radicals will ever succeed in overthrowing capitalism?" Hunter asked.

"No, I don't. Not a chance. . . . They are too weak. Capitalism will eventually fall of its own weight. It is founded on a false conception of values—on documentary wealth—on an idea that is essentially unsound. It will finally collapse by becoming entirely unworkable.

"As a matter of fact, it's temporarily broken down in Europe right now and is lying flat in the road with the traffic stopped on each side of it. Its legs were too weak to carry the weight of worthless paper, bunk, property titles, claims, oratory, and statesmanship that were piled on its back.

"The perspiring veterinarians are crowded around it at this moment trying to get it on its feet. You can read their various prescriptions in the newspapers every day. They will eventually get it going again, for awhile"—Michael paused and laughed so loud that the startled chip-

munk on the wall darted into his hole—"they'll get it on its feet again, but from now on it will have a *chronic* case of blind staggers."

5

"You spoke of documentary wealth just now," Hunter said. "It's a term I've heard—does it really express an idea or is it only—uh—a term?"

"I like your distinction there," Michael laughed. "The distinction between ideas and terms. One might find a science on that alone. Isn't the human mind wonderful?"

"It certainly is," Hunter agreed. He felt flattered and shied a pebble across the road in a boyish spirit of elation. "I thought everybody made that distinction," he said. "I often see words that I know are just terms—they don't really mean anything. So, there's a real idea in documentary wealth, eh?"

"Yes, indeed," Michael went on. "I'll tell you what it is. It's simple enough.

"Real wealth consists entirely of useful commodities. Anything you consume, wear, live in—that constitutes real wealth. . . . All wealth is created by labor applied to natural resources. That's self-evident, isn't it?"

"I—uh—I think so," Hunter assented with hesitation. "There's only one doubt. How about intellectual products? A book, for instance? That doesn't come from labor applied to the earth. That comes from the mind."

"But while the author was taking time to write the book somebody had to give him food. That comes from the earth. So——"

"Yes, I see," Hunter said.

"And we can go even further. Consider an invention. Take the electric light. Well, the invention of the electric light is of no value whatever until it is furnished with power, wires, filaments, globes, and so on. All these come from the earth and are produced by labor. . . . It's virtually self-evident that wealth is the product of labor applied to the ground——"

"How about capital?" Hunter asked.

"Capital consists of nothing but tools and food. Tools to work the ground and food to sustain the laborer. But both food and tools are products of labor themselves, so capital is simply labor's child.

"Now, the world lives almost literally from hand to mouth. We consume this year what we grew last year. The clothes we wear this year were on a sheep's back or in a cotton field last year. The eggs you ate this morning were probably laid within the last few weeks. Your morning newspaper was a spruce tree six months ago.

"If all production should stop the whole world would starve to death in a year. Therefore, it's pretty plain, I think, that the human race doesn't save wealth to any considerable extent."

"How about buildings, railroads, and so on?" Hunter said. "We construct them, and that's a form of saving."

"Yes, we do save tools and equipment, including buildings—but it doesn't amount to much. Even the most substantial building is only semi-permanent, and requires constant renewing. Tools and machinery wear out in a few years. Railroads are being continually rebuilt. The life of an ocean steamer is less than twenty years."

"Well, what do we save, then?" Hunter exclaimed. "The world is getting richer all the time."

"No-o," Michael said slowly. "Not much richer, in reality. It's increasing constantly in fictitious wealth. Paper values are growing. Its capitalization is getting bigger all the time, and the fictitious element in land values is going up, as more people come into the world to live.

"That's all general. . . . Let's take a specific case. . . . Well, consider the value of land in cities. New York, for instance. The land on which New York City stands has a paper value of about four billion dollars—that is, the ground exclusive of buildings. I say *paper value*, because its actual value is only trifling. Twenty years ago this land was worth only about two billion dollars. Can you tell me why it has doubled in value in twenty years?"

"Why, yes," Hunter answered. "More people have gone to New York to live; the population has increased, and there's greater demand for land. It's a simple principle of economics—the law of supply and demand."

"That's right," Michael said. "That's why the land values of New York City alone have added two billion dollars to the national wealth in twenty years. . . . Now, I'll ask you another question. This is a question of discrimination; I'm going to ask you to decide as to the relative value of two things."

"All right. Go ahead."

"Let's suppose two events were to happen. One would be the doing away of land values in New York City. Instead of being worth four billion dollars, suppose this land were suddenly considered as worth nothing at all—I mean it would simply be wiped off the books. That's one event.

The other event, let's say, would be the burning up of a barn in Minnesota with a hundred bushels of wheat in it. . . . Now, I ask you which of these happenings would cause the greater loss to mankind? The loss of one hundred bushels of wheat, or of all land values of New York City? I'm not referring now to the loss to individuals; I'm referring to the destruction of actual wealth."

Hunter sat and thought gravely of this question for several minutes. "We-ell," he said after awhile, "if you look at it from the standpoint of real, actual wealth I suppose the hundred bushels of wheat would be the larger loss of the two. The wiping out of the land values, though, would be a terrible disaster financially."

"We're not speaking of financial disaster," Michael said. "We are talking about the difference between actual wealth and paper wealth. You've got it right there. Now you know why the world appears to be increasing in wealth.

"This paper wealth is all represented by documents. These documents have the power of controlling labor. As each new generation comes into the world it finds itself confronted by them. They are a demand note on wealth that is yet to be produced. Do you get that?"

"Yes, I know what you mean," Hunter replied.

"It's the dead hand, reaching up from the grave, and interfering with the affairs of living men.

"In this we see the essence of capitalism—the creation of documents that have the standing and power of real wealth, and through which mankind is controlled. These documents can be liquidated only by the product of labor."

6

This conversation had turned out differently from what Hunter had expected. When he began it he thought that he might evoke a sound talk on business management from Michael Webb—the kind of wisdom that he had seen in magazines occasionally, occupying a full page and surrounded by a decorative border, and starting off something like this :

I am the man of business;
I am the thing that thinks;
I am the doer; the go-getter.

But no. Michael didn't talk like that, and Hunter's disappointment was profound. He had an innate distrust of ideas which were not generally accepted; he was from Missouri, and you had to prove it to him. . . . Any crank can utter an opinion, but it's not sound until it's proved.

But he did not express his disappointment. He had in full measure the great respect which Americans always feel for renown—and, however queer Michael's views might be, it was certain that he was a celebrated man—so Hunter modestly kept his own opinions to himself.

"The whole structure is founded on crude unrealities." Michael continued. "The thing is so simple that anybody can understand it when it is once explained to him. As soon as its workings are fully grasped by the majority of people the entire fabric of bonds, paper wealth, banking houses, sanctimonious advice, stock dividends and elephantiasis of the cranium will melt down into a mess of sloppy mud. That's why they are almost scared to death by the poor, little feeble radical movement.

"It is to the interest of a great many people to keep the system standing, and in working order. They are highly rewarded through its far-reaching anti-social activities, and will fight for it to the last ditch.

"They have found out that it cannot stand the slightest touch of reality, so they are constantly devising means to divert discussion, and turn inquiry into some other channel. In fact, for a long time the whole matter was treated in the light of moral ferocity——"

"Moral philosophy?" said Hunter incredulously. "Is it really a question of moral philosophy?"

"I said *moral ferocity*," Michael went on. "If the subject was mentioned, the police were called in, and affidavits were made to the effect that you were in the pay of Moscow and Berlin, besides being a free lover, atheist and a crank—and, in general, were to be considered a candidate for the penitentiary.

"This method was not as effective as one might think, considering its dynamic character. So that plan was abandoned, and a new one was put in operation."

"What is it?" Hunter asked, just to see what queer reply he would get.

"Why, at the present moment they manufacture large quantities of bunk and scatter it around rather freely in the form of intellectual insect powder. . . . So we have now a complete outfit of bunk morals, bunk optimism, bunk magazines, bunk religion, bunk finance and bunk democracy."

7

Yes. Hunter's admiration was strained. It's a melancholy thing to meet personally those whom you have admired at a distance. Have you ever met your favorite poetess? Have you ever met a grand opera star? Have you ever talked with a member of the Senate Committee on Foreign Affairs? Have you ever lunched with a captain of industry?

If you have ever had any of these experiences, then we need say no more about Hunter's disillusionment.

Yet, he still had a deep feeling of respect for Michael Webb. He recalled what Michael had done for Second-Rate. . . . One must make allowances, he thought, for philosophers. They always have a weird streak.

Chapter Fourteen

The Wholesome Defeat of Blurr

I

THAT day there were sibilant earth-voices whispering about the over-arching elms; and the odor of lilacs; and the caress of summery colors coming to the eye like a kiss.

The faraway hillside fields shimmered under the stroke of the wind as green velvet shimmers under the stroke of a hand.

"There are ghosts about today," Michael said nonchalantly.

Hunter shook his head with a knowing gesture. "I don't believe in spirits. All superstition."

"I do. I believe in them," Michael continued. "You meet them everywhere. Some are too lovely for words, like the ghost of Spring. She is here now. I felt her pat my cheek just then."

"Oh—oh, I see," Hunter laughed. "You mean poetic fancies. I thought you were talking about those spooky Conan Doyle ghosts. . . . Sure, Spring's ghost gave me a little hug, too."

"Charming, isn't she? I wish we could see her. We could, I am sure, if our vision were finer and deeper. I can

see her in fancy. Light as a spray of dogwood blossoms, with her finger-tips steeped in violets."

"How do you know it's a *her*? It might be a *him*."

"The spirit of Spring a *him*!" Michael exclaimed. "There's no use going out of our way just for the sake of being improbable. I'll concede that the ghost of Winter is a *him*; as rugged as that old oak, and as full of warts and knobs. But Spring! Her lap full of apple blossoms and arbutus and cooing doves! How would a man ghost look in that posture? There is such a thing as the eternal feminine, after all."

At that moment a small lavender-colored, two-seated motor car came singing down the road. A woman was in it alone, her clothes a-flutter with speed. As it drew near the two men recognized Miss Merrifield. She saw them too, and brought her car to a stop with a slither of tires on the coarse gravel of the lane.

"Oh, hello," she called out cheerily. "You two look like pilgrims resting on the way to some distant shrine."

Michael and Hunter rose and came slowly over to her, both of them struggling with that rather blank feeling which men have when talking to a woman whom they do not know very well.

"We've just been thinking of the goddess of Spring," said Michael.

"And then she comes along in a lavender car," Hunter added. The words were hardly out of his mouth before he felt that he had said something silly. But this trepidation lasted only an instant, and he was cheered up by the way she received it.

"That's beautifully said, Mr. Hunter, and I nominate

you for a place at the court of the Sun King," Miss Merrifield remarked. "Every woman likes to be referred to as a goddess. It's our one weakness."

Then Hunter remarked that it was a lovely day, though a little warm; and that there ought to be rain soon. Rather lame, considering his gallant start.

"Come over and have a cup of tea, before you resume your pilgrimage," Miss Merrifield said, and pointed with a gloved finger to her diminutive red-roofed Italian villa, about a hundred yards down the road.

They walked by the side of the car while she kept it moving by light touches on the accelerator.

"We were talking of ghosts," said Michael. "I believe the world is full of them. Ghosts of dead ideas, faiths, and what-not."

"And more than that," Miss Merrifield said, "we're all ghosts ourselves—ghosts of our ancestors. Doesn't Ibsen's play appeal to you powerfully?"

Hunter's list of best books did not include Ibsen's "Ghosts," and he did not know what she meant. Michael shook his head doubtfully. "I don't know. Somehow it never gave me a feeling of conviction. Of course, a person may inherit a physical weakness; but I—I think intellectual ghosts are much more powerful than physical ones."

By this time they had reached Miss Merrifield's gate—a wide green door in a high ivy-leaved wall of stucco—and they passed inside. The house could not be seen from the road. It stood in a quiet garden of gentle flowers and moldering bits of statuary. Tall poplars were around it, and growing out of the terrace was a wide-spreading elm. On the terrace, under the majestic tree, was a tea-table set

with white linen and tea-things of hammered silver. In the sun, before the door, a coal-black cat snoozed.

"Listen to that," Miss Merrifield said, as the car ran slowly up the cindered road. "Something's the matter with this motor, and has been for a couple of weeks. It makes that chugging noise and shakes most fearfully sometimes."

"It doesn't sound exactly like a carbon knock," Hunter said, inclining his head over the slow-moving car's hood.

"There may be something working loose around the crankshaft," Michael ventured. In these times, every other man in America pretends to be a motor mechanic.

"I'd take it to a repair man, if I were you," Hunter suggested, as Miss Merrifield brought the car to a stop before the terrace, and stepped out.

"There's not much use," she laughed merrily. "I think our repair man here in the village must be a pupil of yours, Mr. Webb. Anyway, he's convinced that it's very important to be second-rate——"

"I'll wager he's a good business man," Michael said.

"He is," she agreed. "He always says there's nothing the matter with the car. A cheerful soul. Then he does something to it, so it will run about a month."

Michael looked at her and laughed softly. There was a faint smile around her mouth at first; then she joined him and they laughed together like two children. Hunter had the hood of the car raised with his head buried in its insides.

"You're jolly, aren't you?" she said. "I don't know what there is to laugh about, but I can't stand here and see you laugh alone."

"Oh, I'm just laughing at my pupils," he replied.

"Well, come in and have some tea," she smiled, "and maybe we'll think of something else to laugh about. That's Sixpence"—she pointed at the cat, who had awakened and was yawning cavernously—"I paid sixpence for him in Devonshire, where black cats are held by all authorities to be the luckiest creatures living."

A French peasant maid brought tea and cakes. . . . "I think the trouble is that the connecting rod bearings on the driving shaft are loose," said Hunter.

"Is that only an opinion, or is it dogma?" Michael demanded.

Hunter smiled. "I'd call it dogma," he answered. "I'm not infallible, of course, but I know what I know."

"Well, I'll tell you what I will do, Miss Merrifield," Michael announced. "I'll borrow some old clothes from the Ellerman chauffeur and come over here tomorrow, and fix it up for you."

"Oh, thank you," she said, "but I really couldn't think for a moment of letting you do it. What an imposition! You're trying to pay penance now for what I said about your disciples. . . . It was just a joke. I didn't mean it. . . . I'll take the car up to him."

"No, please let me do it," Michael insisted. "I love mechanical work. It would be lots of fun."

"I'll come, too, Miss Merrifield, and help him," Hunter said.

"Now, that's right," Michael remarked. "Now we're getting it arranged. I'll supervise the job, and Hunter can get under the car. I'm even better at supervision than I am at work."

"Very well—and thank you," she said. "Come on and

do it then . . . *si cela vous convient*. I'll have luncheon for you."

"And you'll read us poetry while we work," Michael suggested.

"Certainly," she replied. "Could I do less? But—but it will be a terribly dirty job, won't it? I think you'd better not do it."

"It'll be dirty to a fare-you-well," Michael replied. "That's what we're doing it for. An excuse to get soiled."

"You're just a great big boy," Miss Merrifield remarked. "I believe with a little encouragement you would make mud pies."

It is the universal experience of mankind that when a woman says you're a great big boy, she is beginning to have a more than ordinary interest in you. Michael knew that, and it gave him a feeling of elation. He marveled at the effectiveness of such a simple device. If I were a woman—he thought—I'd call every man up to the age of seventy a great big boy, and radiate happiness in every direction.

"Oh—I've just thought of something! Not tomorrow," she exclaimed. "I'm going to visit some friends over in Greenwich tomorrow. Would next day do?"

"That would suit me," both Michael and Hunter said in chorus.

"You really like to play around machinery, do you not? Both of you." Miss Merrifield looked at them thoughtfully. "Women don't. I wonder why?"

"Because a woman's a woman," Michael asserted.

"Do you mean that women lack constructive ability?"

"No," Michael replied. "Women, as a class—at least, so I think, have as much constructive ability as men. It is

often undeveloped. But most women are lacking in the power of generalization."

"Oh," Miss Merrifield said reflectively. "And what has that to do with machinery?"

This lady is not addicted to light conversation, Michael thought. Wants to get to the bottom of things.

"Well," Michael resumed. "A mechanical device is the focussing point of the general laws of energy and force. To understand it thoroughly we must be able to make generalizations about applied force—and this is not in line with the usual feminine manner of thinking."

"I like generalizations, and general laws," exclaimed Miss Merrifield. "I for one."

"I see you do," Michael agreed. "I didn't say that all women hate them. . . . The masculine love of generalization is nothing to be proud of——"

"But it's so convenient. It's labor-saving." Miss Merrifield pondered, toying with her tea-cup and spoon. "It's a habit that helps one in classifying things."

"It's the second great outstanding vice of the human intellect," Michael said. "Consistency is the first, and generalization is the second. It is labor-saving—that I'll grant. But it is often—nearly always, in fact—dead wrong. . . . Consider a few generalizations. For example, all Southerners are courteous. Well, *they're not*. All Jews are grasping and tricky—that's another. That's not so, either. All education is beneficial. No, it isn't. All self-made men deserve credit and approval. That's a fine, juicy generalization in high favor. It's wrong. Some deserve credit; others deserve the penitentiary. All men are equal. That's not true; they're not equal——"

"You're quoting the Declaration of Independence, I suppose," Hunter interrupted, "and it says *all men are created equal*."

"Yes, you're right," Michael assented. "That's the way it reads, but it is not true. Men are not created equal; they have vastly different capacities, given to them by nature. The signers of the Declaration subscribed to that statement with their tongues in their cheeks. They didn't believe it; nobody ever has believed it, and the total effect is that the Declaration of Independence adds its little mite of bunk to the world's huge store."

There was the sound of a motor car stopping outside, and an instant later Miss Fanny Thornton ran in, breathless and charming.

Lost in a wilderness of feminine "Oh's" and "Ah's," the two men stood awkwardly at the tea-table. Presently the idea emerged. Miss Thornton had been summoned to Los Angeles by a telegram (so, after all, there was somewhere in existence a human being who could summon Miss Thornton—thought Michael—a man heavy with authority and pride) and she was on her way to catch the train.

"Haven't you time for a cup of tea?" Miss Merrifield suggested.

"I haven't a moment," said the face made famous on a thousand screens. "Not a moment. I just ran in to say good-bye. I've enjoyed my stay so much—so much. Everyone has been so charming." She laughed in good humor and excitement. Michael noticed that when she laughed her lower lip shaped itself into the form of a mobile triangle, and she showed her little cat's tongue and white teeth.

She did not appear as beautiful as she had seemed the

day before. Michael wondered, in his thick masculine way, what had happened to her. There was an air of Dresden china fragility about her, a pink waxiness of features, which puzzled him.

Then he realized that she seemed different because he caught her and Miss Merrifield in his eye at the same time. The plainness of Miss Merrifield—her grey-green eyes—her rich, copper-colored hair—the pallor of her face—all radiated a luminous sense of soul which made the screen idol appear almost transparent and colorless. An artificial flower in a vase of roses.

She kissed Miss Merrifield long and ardently. "You must come to Los Angeles sometime soon, dear," she urged, "and let me return some of the lovely times you've given me here in the East."

"I'll try. Perhaps I shall," said Miss Merrifield.

Saying good-bye to Hunter, she then turned to Michael, and gently took his hand. "Good-bye, Mr. Webb—good-bye," she cooed. "Don't let yourself get excited—ever. Promise me, now, won't you?"

"Yes, Miss Thornton, I promise," he said—and, moved by a sudden spirit of travesty, he continued, "Shall I send you the other four acts? I can finish them in a week if I work myself up to the proper pitch."

Miss Thornton laid her finger on her lips and shook her head sadly from side to side. "No, don't—please don't."

2

"She's a most affectionate young woman," Miss Merrifield said after she had gone. "We really haven't a thing in

common, but she seems to like me immensely. I can hardly understand it."

"I'm afraid I didn't make much of a hit with her," Michael remarked.

"Didn't I hear you say something about a play?" Miss Merrifield asked. "Are you writing a play for her?"

"Hardly," Michael said. "The fact is, I'm busy not writing a play for her."

"Oh. . . . What is that you've got in your hand?" Miss Merrifield pointed to the stick in Michael's hand, on which carved eyes and faces were beginning to show.

"That's a telling-stick," Hunter answered, proud of his knowledge. "The Tlinklat Indians, you know. Oh, I beg pardon——" he stopped embarrassed. "Mr. Webb will explain it to you. He's just told me."

"No, no, you go ahead, Hunter," Michael reassured him.

"But what is the story, Mr. Webb?" Miss Merrifield asked, when the nature of a telling-stick had been explained to her.

"I'll tell you," Michael replied. "This round-faced maiden at the top is called Gunju. She's the daughter of a great chief"—the blade of his knife slid further down the piece of wood—"he has the biggest mouth and the loudest yell in the tribe. Well, the maiden Gunju, while drinking at a spring, swallows a tiny snake by accident. This slip on her part results in her giving birth to a raven, whose name is Blurr. . . . The raven's going to be right here—you can see his bill carved already. He's a mean devil, Blurr is. He goes out and gets the sun and moon and stars and puts them in a box, and brings them to his mother. . . . There's the box, see it? Gunju is sitting on it. Everybody's flab-

bergasted. Can't get along without the sun, moon and stars. . . . Blurr is a natural born monopolist, so he says nothing, and lets them all foam at the mouth with rage.

"Now, a great warrior, named Makko, gets in the thick of it. See Makko there, holding a club in his arms like a child carrying a doll?"

Miss Merrifield put her finger on Makko, and nodded.

"Makko is an anti-monopolist by nature, and a valiant fighting man. He boasts loudly of what he intends to do. He is going to kill the raven with his club, and put the heavenly bodies back where they belong. So he comes along the road, swinging his club, and cracking a few skulls just for practice. When he arrives on the scene, Blurr promptly picks out his eyes. And this is the end of Makko.

"With Makko gone, nearly everybody gives up hope—and the belief that Blurr has a property interest in the sun, moon and stars is rather generally accepted.

"Then from the south comes a man without a club—a man greasy with guile. Here he is on the stick—just below Makko. I've completed only his outline. His name is Tlack. He says he comes to admire Gunju and her raven son, and he brings with him a bag of some strange, delicious red fruit—cherries, I fancy—which he gives to the raven.

"Blurr eats so much of the strange red fruit that he falls into a stupor. I'll have him here lying on his side"—Michael indicated a place near the bottom of the stick—"and thereupon the man of guile makes love to Gunju, and steals the box containing the sun, moon and stars. After that, he puts Blurr in a cage, and the raven awakes from his stupor to find himself a captive.

"Taking the box under one arm and the cage under the

other, he goes away. He magnanimously restores the sun, moon and stars to their places, and thus becomes a benefactor of humanity. For the rest of his life he makes a good living exhibiting the great raven Blurr in a cage.

"The moral of this telling-stick is that a sly nature is a pearl above price."

"What an interesting story," Miss Merrifield exclaimed. "It's primitive, right from the soil. Folk-lore?"

"Yes, it's folk-lore," Michael replied. "I'll give you this stick when I've finished it, if you want it."

"Thanks," she replied. "You're the most generous person I've met in a long time. You make me laugh and then you offer to fix the car——"

"Offer to?" Michael broke in. "We're going to, aren't we, Hunter?"

"That's right," Hunter answered.

"You're going to fix my car, and now you give me a telling-stick. I suppose you haven't anything else?"

"Oh, yes," Michael said. "I have a pocket full of peacocks."

"And apes and ivory," she added. "Are you a merchant of Cathay?"

"I am, but I'm a little short of apes and ivory. I had some, but I lost most of them in a gambling hell at Samarcand."

3

"I wish I could talk the way you do," said Hunter gloomily, while he and Michael walked back to Shadow Lawn in the late afternoon. "I couldn't think up a thing to say to Miss Merrifield."

"You mean you would like to be a glib talker," Michael suggested.

"Well, not exactly glib. I mean—you know—that easy way you talked to her."

"The way to do it," Michael said, "is to reject all sober sense. You were trying to think up something important to say. I could see you were. Well, I don't want to discourage you, but the plain fact is that everything important was said before you were born, and now if you say the same thing over again in the same way it makes people bored and moody. There is, indeed, a certain momentum given to an idea by incessant repetition—any advertising man can tell you that—but in time this repetition destroys its own value. You seldom hear a clock tick, you know, unless you put your mind on it."

"But how can you ever put a new idea into people's heads, then?" Hunter asked.

"Come here and I'll tell you," Michael said, and he took Hunter by the sleeve and pulled him closer. "I'm going to whisper this important secret; there might be somebody hiding behind a tree. Listen now to an old veteran idea-shooter. You put new ideas over by making people laugh. All new ideas are looked upon as dangerous, and people fight them as they fight tigers. But all clowns are considered harmless. So you get a man to laughing and before he knows it you've passed your idea on to him. When he reaches home and finds it out there's the very devil to pay. . . . How in the world did this idea ever get into my head?—he shouts—and goes fuming and raging around the house. . . . His poor, shrinking wife is terrified. . . . Maybe you've been exposed to ideas somewhere today, dear—she suggests.

No, I haven't—oh, yes, now I know—that fellow put this idea in my head while I was laughing at him.

"That's the way it's done, Hunter."

With perfect gravity Hunter said, "I'm awfully glad to learn that, Mr. Webb. I'll remember it."

4

Upon returning to Shadow Lawn they saw, through the French windows of the ground floor, Bingo Ellerman seated before a high-ball in the smoking-room, looking over a copy of the *Spur*.

"Wait here a minute," Hunter said briefly. "I'm going to try your advice and make a fool of myself."

Michael waited at the door, while Hunter entered the room, made a wry face at the younger Ellerman and barked, *bow-wow-wow*. Then he barked some more, imitating the faithful watch-dog.

"Hey there," Bingo sang out. "What are you barking at me for? Got hydrophobia, or something?"

"Gee, I was rotten, my darling," Hunter answered.

"Look here, somebody's been feeding you meat," Bingo shouted. "Somebody's been feeding you meat—and I know the son of a gun who did it. Come in here, and have a drink, old top."

Michael peeped into the room, and saw Bingo and Hunter seated before a couple of tall glasses and as he silently walked up to his room he felt the inward satisfaction that comes from having done a good deed.

Chapter Fifteen

Venus and the Philosophers

I

THERE was no hunger in Richard Ellerman's soul for beauty as an expression of life; he was devoid of any sense of the artistic. He liked comfort—but, with comfort assured, it would have made no difference to him whether he lived in a wooden barracks on a bare hillside or in a marble palace in a park. Nevertheless, his enormous house was filled with curious and beautiful *objets de vertu*. He was a collector, on a grand scale, of all sorts of rare and costly things. This was a function of his gnawing urge for power, an escape from the devastating sense of inferiority which had lain upon him like a grievous malady since his poverty-stricken childhood. It was food and drink to his ego-consciousness to possess things which people admired—but which he owned—things before which beauty-smitten worshippers almost knelt in adoration.

In his nature there was a touch of the showman, tempered and toned down from a swelling exaggeration which might have readily become Barnumesque in a different frame, to a plane of gracious courtesy befitting the seigneur of a lordly country house. He liked to show his various collections, and talk about their rarity, their cost, and the

difficulties that had surrounded their acquisition. His interest always lay in collections of material things—never in collections of ideas.

Michael Webb was different. He collected ideas as Richard Ellerman collected silver snuff-boxes. These two natures were immeasurably remote from each other in aspiration and motive. Richard Ellerman looked upon life as an end in itself; while Michael Webb, exploring the hidden corners of thought and feeling, considered life as a transient phase of some larger scheme of existence. He thought that people live for the sole purpose of gaining experience, and that this object cannot be attained without a constant and pressing contact with reality.

Now we see Richard Ellerman, at ten o'clock in the morning, taking his guests on a personally-conducted tour of Shadow Lawn. This was his invariable custom when new people were in the house. . . . There was in his mind a sketchy itinerary which he usually followed.

The Flemish painters in the large hall came first. Rembrandt, Gerard Dou, Hobbema, David Teniers the younger, Van Dyck and Peter Paul Rubens. He possessed fine examples of the work of each of these artists, sombre canvases which made one think of lowering skies and winter sunsets. Among them there was also a conventional picture by Pieter de Hooch, with its clear, incisive lights and gleams of marble tiling and spotless floors. . . . He was absolutely sure of the genuineness of everything, for he purchased nothing without expert advice. His running descriptions were banal, rapid, precise, and never varied. They sounded like the summaries of a dealer's catalogue.

In the morning room one came upon the modern Spanish

school. There was the thrumming flare of Goya's splash of color—the toreador, the eager faces, the yellow walls, the translucent sky, the hard sunlight and the steely shadows—and there was the ineffable sea and sky of Sorolla y Bastida, and his light-hearted loftiness of spirit.

There was a tone of bantering depreciation in Ellerman's remarks about most of his possessions. "That piece of colored rag cost thirty-six thousand dollars," he said, "and I doubt if it's worth it."

Then there were the bronzes. He ran his hand affectionately over a statuette of a bucking horse by Gutzon Borglum; he really liked that thing—and Pisanello's fine medallions—and the Venetian candlesticks, made long ago by Vittoria—and the modern enamels of Paris and Limoges. . . .

He opened a door in the wall and turned on an electric light which revealed a short flight of carpeted steps leading downward. "Come with me now," he said, "and I'll show you a collection that is superior to anything else of its kind in the world."

It was a collection of bottles in an immense, well-lighted room. It was indeed stupendous. There were more than five thousand bottles, specimens of every age from the early Egyptian to the modern era of hooch. . . . Bottles of glass, of silver, of gold, of copper, of jade, of leather. . . . Bottles that were beautiful, grotesque, ugly, strange. (I remember one shaped like a ball. It was composed of four glass snakes intertwined. The snakes' heads were the stoppers. The four snakes were of different colors—crimson, blue, green and yellow—and each snake's body was a separate bottle.)

Next came the library, where he had the librarian show

the Kelmscott Chaucer on vellum, the first edition of *Robinson Crusoe*, and the fragmentary fifteenth century Bible. . . . The guests, with their host leading, filed out in a chorus of well-bred admiration. The next stop was the maze, where he intended to make a jolly occasion of it, and lose them in its intricate alleyways.

Michael felt oppressed by the weight of material things—things separated from their creative spirit—and he had no mind for the maze. So he remained in the library, refreshing his soul with ideas, while the laughter of people lost in endless winding paths came in through the open windows.

2

Michael was not bookish; but he was filled with an insatiable intellectual curiosity. He cared nothing for books as books, but only for the ideas and emotions which they evoked. His curiosity was intense and without reverence for anything or anybody. He welcomed a new idea by knocking it down flat, as lumberjacks are said to welcome a new companion. If it could not rise again, he paid no further attention to it. Ideas which could not stand rough handling he considered unworthy of notice. His capacity for assimilating thought was enormous. He read everything and thought of everything. . . . He was one of the few men living who could appreciate the ideas of fools, so his choice of books was wide and liberal.

He was an intellectual aristocrat, with the aristocrat's feeling for comedy. He saw himself surrounded by a world of jokes; and the biggest joke of them all appeared to him to be the pork-fed materialism of the age. It began

with the invention of the steam engine, which led to the Deification of Mechanical Power. This paganism is so impressive, so rich in pageantry, and so generous in bread and circuses, that it inspires the worship of other deities. So, there has come about the Deification of Science, of Chemistry, of Biology, and other forces.

God, in the meantime, has been stripped of one dignity after another, until he has become nothing but an ultimate biological necessity, and in this fashion he plays his part as the doormat of the universe. . . . In the beginning, it seems, He did actually potter around a bit and created a little dab of germ plasm and a few electrons. After that He lost his job, and scientific laws took charge of things.

A consideration of this modern paganism led Michael into a profound discovery—that of the intrinsic inability of the second-rate mind to grasp spiritual facts. In science it weighs and measures; in economics it deals in formulas; in religion it can only understand rewards and penalties; in life it can only understand material success and catastrophes.

As for Michael himself, he could put out his hand and touch God, and sometimes he did it just for fun; and as for the existence of the soul, he could feel his own soul as plainly as he felt the shoes on his feet. And, at times, he could hear the laughter of God come rippling down the universe.

That all logic—if extended far enough—involves itself in a contradiction of truth, came to him as an amazing fact. In this revelation he saw the limitations of the syllogism as a vehicle for the exploration of reality. He turned this subject over and over, and even meditated the writing of a book, to be called *The World as a Mass of Contradictions*, which

he hoped to fashion somewhat after the manner of Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung*. Nothing came of this project. Such a book—he felt—would be too funny to be taken in the right philosophic spirit by the serious second-rate intellect.

(Even now Michael Webb is considered by keenly critical observers as a combination of genius and jackass. History will probably confirm this judgment.)

3

So our hero sat in the library and watched the honest figure of J. Austin Stoner, private librarian of the Ellermans. Picture to yourself a thin and wiry man of fifty, with a pointed pepper-and-salt beard and childish blue eyes. He wears rubber overshoes and a chest protector, keeps a diary, and says "By Godfrey" when annoyed.

In his early youth Mr. Stoner had been a bashful clerk in his father's seedy, impractical bookstore. Then he worked for ten years in the catalogue department of the New York Library side by side with a gentle, spectacled, owlsh young woman who talked to him occasionally about books.

He admired her—and was incredibly lonely—so for three thousand successive evenings, just before five o'clock, he tried to muster up enough courage to ask her if he could call, but never quite got to the point. She liked him, too, and for three thousand evenings she wondered if she ought to ask him to call, but never did it, thinking that he might consider her bold and undignified.

Then he left the Public Library, and became a hermit for fifteen years. His hermitage was the library of a popular

athletic club. Here he seldom saw a human face, and after years of isolation, he could hardly restrain himself from acting like a shy, feral creature when anyone entered the library to look at the World Almanac.

He had very little education, but through long contact with books he had become splattered with erudition as a cook is splattered with grease. He loved books as books, regardless of their contents, and he often read books which he did not understand at all—page after page of gabble. But even this mild sport finally played out, and during his last years of service as the club hermit he began to write cheap adventure stories. The red-blooded moron magazines took all he could write, paid him one-half a cent a word and praised him in breathless blurbs.

Richard Ellerman ran across him at the club one day, about seven years before our story begins, and made him the Ellerman librarian.

At Shadow Lawn he lived in a booklovers' paradise. He was allowed two thousand dollars a month to spend for books without supervision of any kind. "I have to buy fifty or sixty of these every month," he explained to Michael Webb, showing him a novel with a simpering, pink-cheeked girl on the cover. "I wouldn't buy so many, but there's no telling which they may want."

With the rest of his appropriation he indulged his taste for literary curios. The Ellerman library has first editions of nearly all the poets; the best collection of books about pirates in existence; all the literature of voodooism and snake worship; a manuscript volume of Eugene Field's poems; and one section was given entirely to books on strange and crazy religions.

Michael sought Sidney Lanier's *Poems* and carried the volume to a table and arm-chair in the corner. Lanier was one of a dozen poets who lifted him into an ecstasy of the spirit.

Slowly he read *Sunrise on the Marshes*, tasting the sensuous beauty of each line——

“Each winding creek in grave entrancement lies
A rhapsody of morning-stars, the skies
Shine scant with one forked galaxy—
The marsh brags ten: looped on his breast they lie.

Oh, what if a sound should be made!
Oh, what if a bound should be laid
To this bow-and-string tension of beauty and silence
a-spring——”

Charmed with the cool, clear, crystalline pictures which arose in his mind, he read on for pages, pausing at each period——

“—a passionate shiver
Expectant is bending the blades
Of the marsh-grass in serial shimmers and shades—
And invisible wings, fast fleeting, fast fleeting,
Are beating
The dark overhead as my heart beats—and steady and free
Is the ebb-tide flowing from marsh to sea
(Run home, little streams,
With your lapfuls of stars and dreams.)”

Before his vision was the vanishing sweep of the marshes at dawn, the paling stars in the lofty sky, and the rose and purple flush of a sunrise still under the ocean's rim.

Lanier was a first-rater, Michael thought, who lived without appreciation, in poverty, and passed away, heart-sick, with most of his splendid dreams unsaid. . . . What a pity—he reflected—that my book, *The Importance of Being Second-Rate*, had not then been written! Reading it, Lanier might have been inspired to go into the leather goods business, and would have, in time, become a member of the Chamber of Commerce.

5

J. Austin Stoner was excited. Here was a caller at last who really liked the curious and bizarre creations that he had gathered around him. He bent grotesquely over his shelves, the stiff tails of his long cutaway coat standing out straight behind like a grasshopper's wings. He brought books in armfuls and opened them with precision at certain pages.

"Here's something that will gladden your eyes," he said, laying two wide-leaved volumes on the table. Michael looked at the title: *The Pathetic Devices of Venus*, by Walter H. Langmuir. He had never heard of the work. "What's it about?" he asked.

"About the way women get themselves up," Stoner answered, as he sat down and opened one of the volumes. "The author of this work is on to all their tricks. He reduces everything about them to 'a rag, a bone, and a hank of hair.' It's a gold mine of facts."

"The pathetic devices of Venus?" Michael queried. "What's pathetic about them? It seems to me that her devices are rather effective."

"You won't say so when you've looked over these tomes. He exposes them in such a way that the whole thing is just pitiable. Do you know how they make their feet look small?" Stoner asked fiercely. He bent over the volumes like a thin, bright-eyed bird.

"I don't know. How?"

"Why, there are several ways. One method is to put the heel of the shoe in the middle of the foot. Look here"—he pointed to a page containing pictures of women's feet—"see that woman? Well, she has got the foot of a cornfield hand—No. 7—but she makes her friends believe it a No. 3 by wearing shoes with heels in the wrong place. Oh, this is a wonderful book. All that's explained. The author spent years in personal investigation. Do you know that they don't wash their faces?"

"Is that so?" Michael asked. "What do they do?"

Stoner rapidly turned the pages. "It's all here," he said unctuously. "They use cold cream. It's just like rubbing butter on your face instead of water. How do you suppose they keep their stockings up?"

"Those round garters," said Michael doubtfully. "Isn't that it? I'm not married, and I don't know much about such things."

"I'm not married either," Stoner chuckled. "You don't have to be, if you have this book," he added triumphantly. "Oh, no, they don't wear garters. I'll show you." He turned to a chapter and pointed out various illustrations. "You see, they have a sort of harness hanging from their corsets. They get in this harness, and strap everything up. It holds their stockings up and their corsets down. There's one standing in her harness now. She's hitched up."

Taking the volume in his hands, Michael examined the picture. "I don't believe this book's up-to-date, Stoner,"—he shook his head—"not up-to-date. They don't wear corsets any more."

"Yes, they do—I'll bet they do. That man's an authority. . . . What d'you suppose they do when they've got big ears?"

"Cut 'em off—maybe," Michael ventured.

"No, they put their hair down over them, so you never see their ears. What d'you think of that? . . . And they have false eyelashes."

Michael shook his head. "That's a fairy tale," he said.

"No, it isn't. They paste 'em on. Langmuir tells about it, and has illustrations in here showing before and after."

"This Langmuir gentleman doesn't like the ladies, does he?"

"Hates 'em like poison," Stoner said. His tongue lingered over the vowels in "poison," and made it sound like "pohyeesen." . . . "Well, I'll leave these volumes with you, so you can read them when you get ready—and now, I'll go and bring you something else." . . .

Then there was Ouspensky's *Tertium Organum*. Michael pored over it for an hour, his mind grappling with infinity. Its theme is the fourth dimensional conception of matter. Michael read—

"Nothing (in reality) is born and nothing dies; it only so represents itself to us, because we see but the sections of things. In reality, the circle of life is only the section of *something* and that *something* undoubtedly exists before birth—that is, before the appearance of the circle in our space (three-dimensional space), and continues to exist after death—that is, after the disappearance of the circle from the field of our vision."

Michael believed this, but when he endeavored to think of it as an occurrence his mind refused to take the hurdle set up by space and time. His conception was a soul-thought, as real and definite as a box of matches, but it was outside of space and time, and therefore wholly beyond expression in words.

6

Into these bookish cloisters Miss Violet Fleming brought her aura of sexual lure. Her assault was unprovoked, and came of her own volition. Perhaps it was unintentional.

She was a round-faced, black-haired girl, with a faint shred of a lisp on her tongue, knowing black eyes and a super-débutante manner.

"Oh, I'm so tired I'm about to drop," she said to Stoner when he came forward with his habitual air of solicitude. "Danced until all hours this morning. Now, if I had a good novel I'd just lie in bed and purr."

She looked at him with a sudden and gleaming vividness, as if some living thing had darted up to her eyes and peeped out; then she let her eyelids drop slowly. She talked to Stoner with her eyes half-closed.

"What novel would you like, Miss Fleming?" he inquired.

"I don't know. Something with lots of pep in it." With her hands on the backs of two chairs she swung herself clear of the floor in a sort of childish gesture. "They say *Cynthia and Starlight* is good. Let me see it, and if it doesn't start off right, I'll give it back to you."

She changed her mind almost instantly. From the corner

of her eye she caught sight of Michael Webb busy with his reading. "Oh, dear," she exclaimed, "I'm so bored with trashy novels. Serious books are what I really like. Have you any books on philosophy?"

"I should say I have," Stoner replied. "All kinds. What——"

"Something fundamental," she said, pronouncing "fun-da-men-tal" as if it were four words. "Oh, I've done a lot of serious reading, Mr. Stoner. At home we have both Ralph Waldo Emerson and Ralph Waldo Trine. They're just so—oh, I wonder if they were related to each other? They both have the same name. Do you know?"

Stoner took in the question with solemn interest. He was surprised at himself for never having thought of it before. "I don't know," he confessed. "It's an interesting point. I could look it up——" His eyes turned with affection toward his shelves of literary biography.

"Don't bother," she said. "It doesn't matter. I want a nice, good book on philosophy. Something *deep*." She let her voice go down and down on the word *deep*, and gave her head a little toss, as women do when they mean to be emphatic. About her was the faint odor of the jasmine-haunted boxes in which her lingerie was kept by her maid. Through the wide neck of her sweater Stoner saw the soft, white delicate curve of her breast. She looked like a sleek, playful animal destined by God to be a pet.

"Would you like Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*?" Stoner asked. "That's pretty deep." He was inwardly stirred by some indefinable feeling, or impulse, which made him a trifle confused. He remembered that he had felt the same way several times in the old New York Public

Library days, when the owlish girl leaned over his shoulder to ask him a question, and her warm breath fanned his cheek.

"That would be fine! Kant is so wonderful," she gurgled, and switched her eyes around toward Michael, sitting in his corner, unconscious of her presence. There was an air about her evocative of a picture of a playful leopard in a box of rabbits.

"Doggone it," Stoner said to himself as he found Kant's masterly work and blew the dust off its top, "doggone it."

7

With the sour Prussian professor's gnarled and crabbed treatise under her arm Miss Fleming made her way to Michael's corner. "Why, Mr. Webb! So 'here you are,'" she lisped. "Doing your work while all the rest of us are wasting our time. No wonder your talk is so interesting. May I sit down? Or perhaps I'm interrupting——"

Michael held a match to her cigarette and she sat down in one of those deep library chairs in which you seem to be almost sitting on the floor.

"Yes. I'm fiddling around in here; that's all," he said. "What are you doing to amuse yourself?"

"Oh, nothing much. The usual things. Had a lovely time at the club dance last evening. Why weren't you there? I missed you so much."

"You missed me, Miss Fleming? You're joking. You really didn't miss me. I don't care much for dancing."

"But I did miss you," Miss Fleming continued. As she spoke she looked down and her finger idly traced patterns

on the binding of the book in her lap. "The dancing didn't matter. I only do it as a social duty. I detest shallow people."

"I'm sorry I wasn't there if you missed me," Michael said, and looked at her keenly as she sat drawing figure 8's. "It was delightfully nice of you to—to——"

"Oh, I like men who have done things," she said suddenly and raised her head. He thought her eyes were like dusky pools, incredibly deep or absurdly shallow. "I admire women, too, who have great accomplishments. Isn't Miss Thornton *wonderful*? While she was here I simply—well, I just adore her."

"Yes; she's an extraordinary girl," Michael replied.

"I think you admire her just as much as I do, Mr. Webb," she laughed. "You spent a whole afternoon talking with her on the lawn. She's a lucky girl, but in some respects one can hardly envy her."

"Is that so? In what way?"

"She's as cold as ice," Miss Fleming said with a melancholy shake of her head. "Really, you must have seen that. It's most unfortunate. To be so talented, and yet have so little capacity for emotion. She told me that she could never love a man—never. So she said."

"That is too bad. Perhaps it is not lack of emotion so much. It may be self-restraint," Michael said. "Self-restraint in itself is a fine emotion."

Miss Fleming tossed her head and smiled archly. "No, she told me herself that she had tried, time and time again, to love some man—and just couldn't."

"That isn't your trouble, is it, Miss Fleming?" he remarked indifferently.

"I could . . . well, you oughtn't to ask such personal questions. I'll not answer you." Her light silvery laugh rippled out. "Don't call me Miss Fleming; it sounds so formal. My name's Violet. . . . I'm afraid to call you by your first name. You're a great philosopher. I'm only a silly girl."

"Don't criticize yourself, Violet," said Michael with gravity. "You're not silly, and you know it; and I know it. . . . I admire your abilities."

"Now, you're making fun. But I do have a serious side, Mr. Webb. I'm interested in lots of things that people don't know about."

"I have no doubt you are. . . . I see you're reading Kant. That's serious work, indeed."

She glanced at the first chapter of the *Critique*, with her head turned delicately to one side. "I know I'll just adore this book. Writers like this make one think. But it does seem rather difficult." She closed the book and glanced at Michael as if with a sudden inspiration. "You tell me about Kant, won't you? All about him, and what his philosophy is. Of course, I know a little about him, but not much. I'm so interested in all this and I'd dearly love to hear you talk about it."

"Uh—it's a pretty heavy subject," Michael said doubtfully.

"But tell me a little about it. Now, don't be stingy with poor little me."

"Well, Kant was a cranky old fellow who died about the time your great-great-grandmother was born. He was a German—a university professor. This book you have here is his greatest work—it's pure metaphysics, you know—but

he was a scientist, too. He originated the nebular hypothesis——”

“Oh, we studied that in school,” Miss Fleming said enthusiastically. “It’s about the world, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it’s about the world—and then some. I make a special point of this discovery, because it’s usually attributed to Laplace. It’s a historical fact that he antedated Laplace by forty years. He did a lot of work along that line. Mechanistic theory of the universe. He was a thorough Newtonian, which you should be careful to keep in mind in considering his philosophy.

“Among other things he demonstrated that the retarding action of the tides is making the days longer, and——”

“I’ve noticed that,” she said. “They seem lots longer than they used to be.”

“No, Violet, I doubt if you’ve really noticed them being any longer. He showed that they’re getting longer at the rate of only one second in a thousand years. We have daylight saving, so I suppose that makes you think they’re longer.”

“Well, maybe so,” she remarked doubtfully. “Did Kant invent daylight saving, too?”

“No, he didn’t invent that. . . . It’s in the sphere of metaphysics that his enormous reputation was made. He set up, through a valid logical process, four definite sets of contradictions, called antinomies. This word is made up of two Greek words, meaning contradiction. He took the problem of time and space, the beginning of the world and so on—and reached precisely contradictory, but equally logical, conclusions in each case. For instance, he proved by one chain of logic that time has no beginning or end;

and then by another line of reasoning, of the same validity, that it has to begin and end.

"His philosophy, therefore, commits suicide—and the worth of the book you have in your hand, so far as its contribution to human knowledge is concerned, may be represented by the numeral zero. It has considerable value, however, as a philosophical method.

"We are dealing here with the limitations of thought; with the inability of the human intellect to grasp concepts involving the totality of phenomena."

"You know when you talk," Miss Fleming commented eagerly, "you stroke the back of every word with your tongue, just like stroking a cat's back. It's lovely. It's just as if you said, 'go on, little word, and be a pleasant word.'" She gazed at Michael and slowly dropped her eyes.

Michael looked at her quietly for a long instant. "Stroking a cat's back, eh?"

"Yes, you do that very thing," she laughed. "I wish I could."

She had slipped down in her chair, and her short walking skirt had crawled up for six inches or so. Michael glanced at her rounded, silk-clad knees and was inwardly disturbed—a prickly, goose-flesh sensation drove philosophy out of his mind.

"Confound it," he said to himself. He was not alone in his mental soliloquy. Over in the corner the gawky, middle-aged librarian, arranging his books, was also saying to himself, "confound it."

"You had better pull down your skirt, Violet," Michael said gently. "It's above your knees."

She gave it a hasty tug, in astonishment and confusion.

"These walking skirts are so short," she murmured, and settled back in her chair. "Now, do tell me some more about Kant."

"Oh, you have the book," Michael said. "You can read it better than I can tell you. I presume you're familiar with the methods of philosophical inquiry," he added, with a smile.

"I—I don't know," she hesitated. "I've read Havelock Ellis."

"Then you don't need this book," he said briskly. "You might as well hand it back right now."

"Why?" she inquired.

"You know more than Immanuel Kant ever knew. He hated love and lovers, and had no use for women."

"The horrid old man!" Miss Fleming exclaimed.

"No, you really don't need Kant."

"I'd love to have a frank talk with you sometime about Havelock Ellis," she said, with an air of hesitation, while she intently folded and re-folded one of the fly-leaves of Kant's immortal work. "You know so much, and with all your knowledge, I'm sure you could—teach—teach me——"

"Would you like me to teach you?" Michael said slowly, as he unconsciously reached out and laid his hand across hers.

She said nothing. Only looked down and nodded silently.

There was a moment's silence, during which Michael's attention was held, in strange irrelevance, by the whiteness of her hands in comparison with the dark, sunburned roughness of his own.

"I think you'd better go now, Violet," he suggested.

Without looking up at him, she quietly picked up her book

and rose. "I think so, too, my dear," she said. This intimate note came into her speech like the quick raising of a curtain.

8

After she had gone Michael turned again to the book he had been reading, and discovered shortly, to his surprise, that he had been looking at the same paragraph for ten minutes. "Oh, damn!" he said to himself, and laid the book down.

"I don't think I'll read any more, Mr. Stoner," he announced to the librarian. "I've probably read too much. I seem unable to concentrate."

"The same here," Stoner remarked glumly. "Spring fever, or something, has got hold of me. I'm going to stop now and take a good long walk."

An hour later the two men might have been seen far away, trudging side by side over the Westchester hills, pausing on the crests of the ridges, and pointing out to each other the beauties of the scenery.

Chapter Sixteen

The Lure of Gold

I

THE book is called *Pirates and Their Lairs*," explained Mr. Stoner to Michael Webb, as they walked along the country road, "but when he saw it on the bookstall he thought it was *Pirates and Their LIARS*—so that's why he bought it. At first he was disappointed, for he'd read a lot about pirates, but very little about their liars. He hoped this book would give him some information on the subject. It didn't. There was nothing in it but the regular pirate yarns, ships boarded, throats cut, liquor drunk, treasure buried. I have two or three hundred volumes of that kind in the Ellerman library.

"The book cost only a trifle, and he threw it aside; he says he has wondered many times since why he didn't toss it overboard right then and there. Something seemed to hold him back. Then things began to happen—the very next day after he bought the book, in fact."

"The hand of fate!" Michael exclaimed.

"That's what I call it," Stoner resumed. "The hand of fate! At that time his ship was at the East India Docks, loading for Australia. Every morning the cabin boy went out and got the morning paper and had it ready for the

Captain at breakfast. You know, he read the paper while he ate. Well, the day after he had purchased the book he glanced at the first page of *The Times* or maybe it was the *Daily Mail*, or the *Morning Post*—I won't swear as to what paper it was—when his eye fell on an advertisement. It said: Will the purchaser of a book called *Pirates and Their Lairs*, bought yesterday afternoon at a second-hand book-stall on Shaftesbury Avenue, be good enough to return it to its former owner, and receive five pounds for his trouble. The book is esteemed because of its personal associations, and was disposed of by mistake.

"The address given was in North Audley Street, a respectable locality, the Captain says.

"When Captain Dixon read the advertisement he almost fell off his chair. He cut out the advertisement and has it yet. I'll get him to show it to you. . . . Then he recalled to mind that when he bought the book the clerk told him that it had been there only an hour or two—and that a beautiful young lady had brought it in with four or five others—all different.

"Well, to make a long story short, the Captain's pretty shrewd; he knew there was something deep behind it all, so he spent the morning looking through the old volume. The first idea that occurred to him was that money was hidden in it, but he didn't find any——"

"But did he look for the secret?" Michael asked. "Those old books sometimes contain a secret message, in cipher, known only to a few, but when once found, it gives title to an estate."

"Oh, yes, that occurred to him, and I'll tell you the result. The Captain is a man who doesn't overlook much. Before

he found the secret he had to read the book almost through. He sat in his cabin and plugged away at it.

"After awhile he found a chapter about a particularly ferocious pirate named Robinson. The story went on to say that this Robinson was finally hanged at Jamaica. It was well-known at the time that he had buried all his ill-gotten treasure on some island—God knows where. The governor of Jamaica reprieved him for a week, hoping to worm the secret out of him, but it was no use. He went to his death without giving away the information, except that he really had buried the treasure, and that it amounted to two million pounds. The governor himself almost died of vexation.

"The author of *Pirates and Their Lairs* wrote that it was generally believed that Robinson's hoard was buried somewhere in the Marquesas Islands, and that there was reason to suspect that a map showing its location had been given by Robinson to a member of his crew—or to somebody. Just at that place Captain Dixon saw written on the margin in faint pencil strokes the words—*see f. l.* Naturally he couldn't make head or tail of it at first, but after puzzling over it awhile he came to the conclusion that it stood for *see fly-leaf*. The Captain's pretty good at figuring out things. He turned to the fly-leaf, but there was nothing, and he had about given it up when he saw that two fly-leaves had been carefully pasted together along the edges.

"He slit them open, and you can imagine his astonishment. There was a map carefully drawn in ink on one of them. Ah, hah! he said to himself, now I see the nigger in this woodpile. A map of an island, with longitude and latitude marked. At one spot on the island there was a cross, and the word *treasure*. Evidently this was a copy of

the old, original map—then the Captain inspected it closer and he saw that it had been pasted over the fly-leaf. It was an old, faded map—pasted in the book. Then he got out his chart, and looked up the latitude and longitude. The island is there all right, one of the Marquesas.”

“And what did he do?” Michael inquired.

“Just kept his mouth shut. Next day there was another advertisement. This time the advertisement said a reasonable reward would be paid for name and address of seafaring man who had purchased the book. The Captain knew then that they had detectives on his trail.”

“But didn’t he try to find out who was doing the advertising?” Michael asked.

“That’s the strange part of it. He nosed around North Audley Street, and learned that the advertiser was also named Robinson—a bed-ridden gentleman, living in a red-brick house—a Mr. William Savage-Robinson. Now, whether he is a descendant of Robinson, the pirate, we have no means of finding out.”

“Probably is,” suggested Michael.

“The Captain inquired cautiously at several bookstores before he sailed from London, and learned that the book is out of print, and is considered rare. I could have told him that; I’ve had it on my wanted list for five or six years.

“Well, sir—that was ten years ago, and from that day to this Captain Dixon’s life has been a hell. He can tell you a story that will surprise you—the things that could happen to a man in this civilized century. When he reached Sydney he came to the conclusion that interested parties in London had got wind of his having the book—somehow, probably through detectives. Everything possible was done to get it

out of his possession. Second-hand book dealers came down to the dock every day or so and offered to buy old books; and one night he was enticed to an evil resort by a beautiful woman, and plied with liquor. When he returned to the ship he found that his cabin had been ransacked and his valuables had been stolen, but they couldn't find the book, although they had even ripped the mattresses open."

"Why didn't he get a ship and sail for the island?"

"He tried to, but was circumvented on every side. Couldn't get either a ship or a crew. After that, he could see the hidden hand reaching from London all over the world. He could feel it. Mutinous crews, a shipwreck once, voyages in the Mediterranean year in and year out—and when he asked to be transferred to the South Seas the owners laughed at him sarcastically, and told him he'd have to give up some of his notions first, then they'd consider it. Told him they didn't want him to get too far away from home.

"So, finally he left the sea altogether, and that's how I came to know him."

Michael walked along in silence a moment "And now he wants to organize a party to find this treasure," he remarked.

"That's it," the librarian said. "The whole thing is very, very confidential. He and I have talked it over many times, and we decided that we would move in the matter as soon as we could get a good third man. Each of us three to share alike.

"It means a long ocean journey, a spice of danger, perhaps a conflict with turbulent, black-hearted men; and then, untold wealth for each of us three. Would that interest you?"

The tall and pallid librarian was excited. Visions of glittering islands and of white surf curling over reefs came into his head. He was intoxicated with dreams. As he talked he waved his arms and the low-hung western sun sent his shadow in grotesque postures far across the pleasant meadows.

"I'm in favor of the untold wealth part of it," Michael stated, "if there's not much work connected with it."

"Well, suppose we walk down to the village right now, and see the Captain," Stoner suggested, "and if you're satisfied we'll make the compact——"

"In blood?" Michael questioned. "No—not in blood. I don't like things written in blood."

"No, we'll make it in ink," Stoner said. "Make a business-like document of it in black and white."

2

They walked with long quick strides towards Dobbs Ferry, down slanting roads full of sunset. As they entered the single street of the village Stoner, who had been silent for a quarter of an hour, said with the abruptness of a stone splashing into still water, "I've just been thinking how much like the Three Musketeers we are."

Night had fallen, and the little street of shops was aglow with lights when they halted before a low wooden building that bore the sign: J. Dixon, Hardware and House-furnishings.

The windows were cluttered with tools and kitchen utensils, and the sidewalk was narrowed to a footpath by brand new baby carriages. In each carriage there was a

placard announcing a special sale during Baby Carriage Week. A woman was rolling one of the carriages back and forth and testing its springs.

In the dimly lighted interior, which Michael and Stoner entered, there were two clerks in their shirt-sleeves. One was selling a padlock to a cynical looking man of low degree, and the other was opening a large wooden box with a hatchet.

"There is Captain Dixon," Stoner whispered as they made their way to a tiny office in the back of the store. Michael saw a heavy, reddish man of fifty or so bending over a desk.

The Captain came out and shook hands with both of them and invited them to enter. A round-faced man with cheerful blue eyes was the Captain. Michael observed that there was hair on the back of his hands, but not much on the top of his head.

"I understand," Michael began grimly, speaking in slow and measured words, "that there is daring business afoot."

Captain Dixon said nothing for a moment. "Maybe there is and maybe there ain't," finally came from him, evasively.

"You can leave all that out, Captain," Stoner interrupted cheerfully. "Mr. Webb has already agreed to go in with us. You can speak freely . . . he's the gentleman I told you about . . . Mr. Webb, the great philosopher."

The Captain reached out and seized Michael's hand in a great, hairy paw. "I didn't get your name straight when you come in. Stoner always speaks so all-fired low," exclaimed the old sea-salt in his hearty manner. "So you're the big philosopher! Well, you don't look so damned smart——"

"I'm smarter than I look," Michael retorted. "I hope

you're smarter than you look, too. If not, yours is indeed a sad case."

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" the Captain roared with deep-bellied laughter, and brought his hand down with a smack on Michael's knee.

"Well, you've gotta tongue in your head, anyway," he said. "I ain't never had much trafficking with philosophers, but I s'pose it's a trade like everything else. Wanta go in with us, you say?"

"He certainly does," the librarian answered. "That's right, isn't it?" he said, turning toward Michael.

"Surely," Michael asserted. "On one condition, though—mind you. You promised me untold wealth"—he said to Stoner—"and if you don't fix it so I'll get untold wealth, I shall feel very badly put out and pessimistic toward this enterprise."

"Pooh, pooh," the Captain waved his hand in deprecation of that point of view. "The untold wealth part of it is O.K. It's a dead sure thing, and the least of our worries. Millions—and millions—and millions are there, boys, if we can get there and back alive. Are you quick on the draw, Mr. Webb? Can you put a bullet through a man's heart at twenty paces before he can get his own gun into play?"

"I certainly am," Michael said, "I can put a bullet through a fly at——"

He was interrupted by one of the clerks putting his head in through the half-opened door. "We've sold another baby carriage, Cap'n," the head uttered, "but the woman, she wants us to put a mirror on it."

"A mirror on it!" the Captain shouted in irritation. "What for? So she can look at her pretty face while she

wheels the baby? We won't do it." Something about the Captain's manner implied that he was an inveterate bachelor.

"No, that ain't it," the young man replied. "She thinks it would keep the baby quiet. A mirror, you know, sorter like a wind-shield, that she could swing down before the baby and let him see himself. She wants——"

"Sell her one of our fifty-cent looking-glasses, and let her put it on herself," the Captain cried. "I've got no time for foolishness. . . . I'm glad you're good on the draw. Maybe there'll be hot work before we're through."

"The first thing to do, I should say," Michael commented, "is to charter a small ship——"

"A low, rakish craft," the librarian broke in.

"That's what we're going to do," the Captain agreed, "but it's not as easy as you think. By God, I wouldn't be at all surprised to see the bottom blown out of her before we get there. You dunno what I've gone through. See that safe there"—he pointed to a large iron safe in the corner—"it's a wreck. About a month ago they come here during the night and blew 'er open. They didn't get anything but money. Every paper in that safe—so help me, God—was opened and examined and lying here on the floor. . . . I had the book somewhere else. Just sit here a minute. I'll soon be back." They heard him walk with uncertain steps down the dark cellar stairs. In a few minutes he returned with a small, shabby volume in his hand. It had apparently been concealed in some crevice in the wall, as there was brick dust on it.

"There you are," he said, wiping it off with his handkerchief. "They're coming after me in every way now that you could think of. Not longer than a week ago I caught a

man in this room pawing over the books on my shelf up there. When I walked in on him he said he had come to look after the telephone. You won't find the telephone in them books—I told him—and he didn't answer a word."

Michael examined the old volume. It was a presentation copy from the author, whose name was Smithers, to "my old and true friend, William Savage-Robinson." In the back a faded map, crudely sketched on paper now yellowed with age, had been pasted on a fly-leaf.

"My theory is," said Stoner pompously, "that this Robinson is a descendant of Robinson, the pirate. He keeps this relationship dark."

"He probably would," said the Captain.

"He keeps this dark," the librarian resumed, "but this map came down to him. He had no idea that it was of any value until he read his friend's book. Then he saw where the map came in, and how it could be used. But he's bed-ridden, probably only temporarily, so he pasted the map in the book, and hoped to get out of bed some day and get the treasure. It's only a theory," Stoner added modestly, "but it fits the facts like a glove."

"*Don't it, though,*" the Captain said.

3

The three men had dinner at the Magnolia Lunchroom and spent the evening together. They stayed until nine o'clock—which is late for Dobb's Ferry—for they had that fantastic reluctance to go home that distinguishes unmarried men from all other varieties of the human species.

Besides that, the Captain and Mr. Stoner did not know

Michael well, nor did he know them. There was within them all an instinctive urge to become better acquainted with each other.

So they passed the evening in boasting of past exploits. At nine-thirty the Innchroom closed for the night, and the last anecdote was related on the sidewalk. Then they all shook hands, and each went his way.

Michael liked the Captain and Mr. Stoner, and as he walked to Shadow Lawn in the fragile moonlight he wondered if he ought to de-bunk the treasure expedition, just as a matter of friendship.

No—he thought—I shall not de-bunk them. Here is a case where bunk is a balm. They are eaten by boredom as an apple is eaten by worms. It would do them a world of good to sail to the South Seas and dig in the sand and catch turtles, and strum the playful ukelele, and wear necklaces of flowers, and push away, with a repelling and admonitory hand, the caresses of beautiful brown maidens.

And when he thought they would have to go without him he felt unhappy for a moment.

Chapter Seventeen

A Jasmine-scented Note

I

TWO massive octagonal towers arose from the stately, ivy-covered façade of the house at Shadow Lawn. The lower room in one of them, an octagon thirty feet in diameter, was almost identical, in purpose and appointments, with the smoking room in a good men's club. The corresponding room in the other tower was consecrated to the ladies. A group of men sat smoking and talking in the octagonal room when Michael returned to the Ellerman castle. He was on his way upstairs to bed when he heard their voices raised in laughter, and he turned back and joined them.

One of the sides of the octagon was occupied by a huge fireplace in which a light fire of crackling wood blazed. Though the day had been warm, a cold tang had come into the air at nightfall, as it often does in the Westchester hills. . . . There were five men in the room. Michael did not know two of them, and with the easy informality of country house manners, nobody introduced him. The other three were Frank Lloyd, Thomas Hunter and Percy Riddle. . . . There was no light in the room save that from the fire, and the men's faces, in its glow, had a curious, unfamiliar look.

Behind them their shadows streamed opaquely, and were transmuted on the flat wall into gigantic, bulbous shapes.

It was an hour of reminiscence, for the cozy, shut-in hominess of the scene relaxed the mind and allowed it to drop gently into retrospection.

"Yes, sir," said one of the unknown men—a large-framed, fat man with a jolly face—"yes, sirree, we had fun in those days. Didn't we, Frank?"

"I'll say we did," replied the sharp-eyed Mr. Lloyd, nodding vigorously. "Three or four young fellows on a vacation generally do have fun. Three of us were lawyers, but we had no practice, and all the time in the world at our disposal. Oh, I've been all over that country down there. Y' remember Ralph?"

"Ralph? Ralph? You mean the guide? His name was Rafe," said the Jolly-Faced Man. "Rafael, I suppose his name was. Called Rafe. Sure, I remember 'im."

"Well, somebody advised us to hire Rafe, or Ralph," Mr. Lloyd said, addressing Michael Webb. "Said he was a good guide, and he was . . . a corker."

"Where was this, Mr. Lloyd?" Michael asked.

"Down in Florida. A good many years ago. We were down there hunting turkeys. Wild turkeys. Well, sir, we drove up to Rafe's place—a little log cabin in a clearing with a stick-and-dirt chimney. Rafe came out with a shotgun in his hands, and about twenty yellow hound dogs piled out of the house with him. . . . You couldn't hear yourself speak for the dogs. Rafe didn't know at first if we were friend or foe, but finally concluded we were O.K., so he propped his gun against the house and came out to the road and said howdy-de-do."

"Yeh . . . yeh, I remember the dogs," said the Jolly Man, with a broad smile.

"We fooled and fiddled around there for an hour or two," Mr. Lloyd continued, "and finally arranged for Rafe to go off with us for a week as our guide. According to his own say-so he knew more about wild turkeys than any man in Florida. . . ."

"And he did, too," the Jolly Man asserted.

"Yes, he did. There wasn't any bunk about that. He knew how to hunt turkeys all right. . . . They're the shyest creature living, Mr. Webb. . . . Well, we started off in the wagon and his wife—I mean Rafe's wife—she came to the door and called out to her husband, 'Looky hyah, Rafe, you know what yure dewin'?'—Mr. Lloyd tried rather comically, if ineffectually, to imitate the speech of a Southern cracker.—'Yure goin' away fur a week, and they ain't a stick o' wood cut fur the house.'

"Rafe stood up in the wagon and called back, 'Well, what you whinin' about, woman? I ain't takin' the axe!'"

Everybody in the room burst into loud guffaws at this retort, and repeated to themselves, "I ain't takin' the axe." Mr. Lloyd, his white hair glistening in the firelight, looked around the circle with the smile usually displayed by the teller of a funny story at its triumphant conclusion.

"The funniest thing about that trip was Albert Hamilton," the Jolly Man said when the laughter had subsided. "Everybody but Albert had killed a turkey or two, and it was kind of getting on Albert's nerves, 'cause he hadn't killed any. . . . Well, we bribed Rafe and rigged up a little joke. Rafe put Albert out by the edge of a swamp, lying flat on the ground, with his gun cocked and resting across a log.

He was told that on no account must he make a movement of any kind. Must be perfectly still. We were to go around the swamp and drive the turkeys toward him——”

“He wanted to know if he could slap mosquitoes; there were a thousand to the cubic foot of air,” Mr. Lloyd remarked, “and Rafe told him, no sir, by no means.”

“Yes,” the Jolly Man resumed, “he understood that he might have to lie there for a good long while before the turkeys came. . . . Of course, as soon as we got out of sight we started back for camp, and left him lying there all the nice, hot afternoon. About supper-time he came in, and I give you my word he was positively freckled from mosquito bites.”

“He thought it a pretty good joke, though, didn’t he?” Michael asked.

“Well, I can’t say he did,” Mr. Lloyd replied. “He was rather grumpy and stand-offish around there for a day or two, until it wore off. Finally he did kill a wild turkey, and he was as pleased as Punch.”

“Tell me, Mr. Lloyd,” Hunter inquired, “is he the Hamilton of the Hamilton car?”

“The same, identical fellow,” Mr. Lloyd answered. He pushed his chair back about three feet. “That fire’s getting too hot. ’At’s the nuisance about these big fireplaces—you always put in more fuel and make a bigger fire’n you need.” . . . Everybody else, with spontaneous unanimity, pushed their chairs back and formed a larger semi-circle. “Yes. He’s Hamilton of the Hamilton Car. In those days he was a travelling salesman, and he had made a good deal of money selling hardware on commission. Soon afterwards he went into the automobile business.”

The other man who was not known to Michael, and who had not spoken at all thus far, gave signs that speech was rising within him. He was about forty-five years of age—a gentleman whose outstanding characteristics were a perfectly bald head and a large black Van Dyke beard. Both his beard and his bald head were so prominent that either would have identified him in case of being lost. . . . He was obviously taciturn, or speech-bound, and when he spoke he did not utter words but secreted them, like water dripping from a clogged pipe. “Albert Hamilton started making cars about the same time as Richard Ellerman,” he secreted—and dripped no more.

“Yeh, that’s right, George,” the Jolly Man continued. “They both started about the same time. It was in the early days and automobiles were a novelty. I remember it well, and how we used to stand around automobiles in the street—always a little crowd gathered around them. Albert Hamilton’s a pretty shrewd fellow. He’s done mighty well. Of course, he’s not a Richard Ellerman, but in his way, he’s made his mark.”

Hunter was astonished at this. Out in the Chicago headquarters they considered the Hamilton car a rather sorry competitor. “Why, my goodness,” he exclaimed with emphasis, “we sell ten cars to their one.”

“Yes, that’s so,” Mr. Lloyd agreed, “but nevertheless Albert’s made quite a big success, considering everything. How much d’you suppose he’s worth, George?” He turned his inquiry toward the Bald-Headed Man.

George waited quite a long time before replying. “We-ell,” he finally dripped, “I do-on’t know. I should say, at a con-ser-va-tive estimate—conservative, mind you—

at a conservative estimate I'd put Albert Hamilton's net worth at—at—well, let us say, five million dollars."

"That's about my idea, Frank," said the Jolly Man. "About five million. He's a darned good business man."

Mr. Lloyd shook his head doubtfully. "Yeh. He's a good man in business, and deserves a lot of credit for the way he's put over his proposition—but he lacks the big, constructive vision of Dick Ellerman."

Both the Jolly Man and the Bald-Headed Man nodded silently in affirmation. "That's what I like about old R. E.," said Percy Riddle enthusiastically. "He sees. That man sees. Take a chap like me. I'm a dub at anything financial. But old R. E. isn't. No, he isn't. You've got to hand it to him."

2

"How did Mr. Ellerman get his start in the automobile business?" Michael asked. "Do you happen to know, Mr. Lloyd?"

"Yes, I know all about it," Mr. Lloyd said with an air of confident and assured knowledge. "At that time I wasn't his attorney, but I came in shortly afterward. It's an interesting story. A reg'lar romance of business.

"Why, the way of it was this. . . . Old Horace Clutterbuck was Richard Ellerman's first wife's father. Richard and the old man were in business together, and about the time Richard married, he and Clutterbuck had a bust-up of some kind. I never knew the pros and cons of that dispute, but in the final settlement Richard took over a good deal of South Side real estate for his share.

"There's one thing you've got to keep in mind when you're considering Richard Ellerman," the Jolly Man broke in irrelevantly and unceremoniously. "His public spirit. He's one of the most public-spirited men in this country."

"He certainly is," dripped from the Silent Man. "Everybody knows what he did in——"

"The particular incident that brings that to my mind just at this moment," the Jolly Man continued, "was related to me by an eminent divine last week. One of the most worthy and eminent men occupying a pulpit in this country. For certain reasons I am not at liberty to give his name. But if I should name him here, every one of you gentlemen would recognize him as one of the best-known preachers of this generation.

"This gentleman told me something that has never been published. He revealed to me that for the last two or three years our good friend Ellerman has been financing worthy—but needy—churches in various parts of the country. Not only in New York city, but everywhere. Without ostentation; without show. Just quietly, as he does everything."

Mr. Lloyd smiled knowingly. "Sure—that's right," he said. "It was a secret for awhile, but now it's coming out. I drew up the papers. He intends eventually to set aside a large sum as a foundation—a foundation, you know, for drawing men to Christianity. He's not a member of a church himself—I mean, not formally. Dick has no formal religion——"

"Well, he's Christian enough for me," said the Jolly Man. "Any man who can do that is good enough for me. Why, man alive, he's throwing barrels of money into Christianity."

"There's a good reason behind it," said Frank Lloyd. "He looked over the field, and he saw that something had to be done to lift the church out of the muck and mire into which it was falling. Unsound. Drifting away from American standards. Why, gentlemen, right in the city of Chicago—and in New York, too, for that matter—I've heard pure socialism preached from the pulpit. They didn't call it that, but it was—downright socialism. I know that's startling, but it's a fact."

"Some of them actually preach the socialism of Jesus," Michael remarked.

Oh, irony, what a delicate, fragile weapon you are! And how easily your arrows go winging away without direction or target, striking only the empty air.

"That's dead right, Mr. Webb," the Jolly Man said, his large, pink face shining with approbation. "That's what they call it—the socialism of Jesus. You've got 'em down pat. Dragging Christ's holy name into their miserable anarchistic doctrines."

"Well, I can tell you now," said Mr. Lloyd, "that when the Ellerman Foundation is once firmly established any sound church—*sound*, mind you, in principle and utterances—will be able to obtain financial aid when needed. I mean—funds to pay off a mortgage, or help out with the preacher's salary."

Hunter's conscience disturbed him. He recalled mentally that he had not been to church in a year, and he would have to change that habit. Under the circumstances, he thought it only right that every good Ellerman man should be a churchgoer. He said nothing of these inward perturbations.

"You were telling us, Mr. Lloyd, about Mr. Ellerman's beginnings in the automobile business," Michael said.

"Oh, yes," Mr. Lloyd resumed. "Well, in the settlement with his father-in-law Richard found himself in possession of considerable South Side real estate.

"There was an old machine shop down in South Chicago included in this real estate. . . . An old, decayed machine shop. . . . There had been a lease, but the lessee couldn't pay the rent, and had to give it up. It was a shop for making automobiles, or horseless carriages, as they were called in those days. That was in 1897. . . . About that time there was a good deal of experimenting with automobiles, and nearly everybody who had anything to do with them went broke.

"Well, gentlemen, Richard Ellerman was a real-estater, and he had no more idea of manufacturing automobiles than I have of becoming a dentist. . . . So he advertised the shop for sale. There didn't seem to be much demand for a run-down machine shop, but one day a man named Addison came in. He was a man of limited education, but he was a first-class mechanic. I suppose he knew as much about motor propulsion as any man then living. He had worked with John Brisben Walker on steam cars—Locomobiles—in that shop in Irvington"—he pointed with his hand toward the northwest—"It's only about a mile from here, isn't it?" He addressed his question to Percy Riddle. "That old automobile factory of Walker's. Right up the road, isn't it?"

"At Irvington," Percy Riddle replied. "About two miles, I should say."

"Addison had worked there," Mr. Lloyd went on, "and then he'd gone out to Kokomo, Indiana, and worked for

Haynes, the father of the gasoline automobile in this country. . . . Oh, he was an enthusiast all right; Addison was. He lived, slept, ate, and talked with automobiles on the brain. He said that the time would come when there would be a hundred thousand automobiles—or horseless carriages, he called them—in the United States.”

The room was filled with half-audible chuckles. “At the present time there are ten million in the country,” Hunter remarked.

“Yes—I know. His talk sounds foolish to us now,” Mr. Lloyd continued. “But it sounded more foolish then, except it was the other way around.

“Well, Addison wanted to buy the old machine shop and make cars. He had all the plans for a new and improved machine. The only trouble with his scheme was that he didn’t have any money. However, he thought he could raise the money if given a little time. Richard held the offer open a month or two, but finally Addison came in and admitted that he couldn’t get any backing. He seemed pretty nearly broken up over his failure.

“In the meantime Richard had been studying Addison. He had the machine shop on his hands, you see, and something had to be done with it. . . . Richard liked Addison. He always likes men who are enthusiastic and not afraid of work. I make a point of this, because some very different stories have been told since about his attitude toward that man. I can bear witness that he was fond of Addison to the very end.

“When Addison gave up his effort to raise the money, Richard told him to take the machine shop anyhow, and they would go halves on the profits. Between them they

cooked up a contract in a friendly way. Addison was to get sixty dollars a week and half the net profits. Richard was to furnish the machine shop and the working capital, not to exceed thirty thousand dollars, and the contract was to run three years.

“At that time I was not Richard Ellerman’s attorney—in fact, I was nobody’s attorney; that was my main trouble. It was a couple of years after that before I began to represent him. . . . Judge Hatcher, a very shrewd and able light of the Chicago bar at that time, was Richard’s legal adviser, and I’ve often wondered since why Richard didn’t get Judge Hatcher to draw up that Addison contract. . . . Dick said he considered it a trifling matter and didn’t think anything much would come of it, so he didn’t bother Judge Hatcher with it. Besides—Addison had no lawyer, and Richard thought it might seem unfair to have all the legal talent on his own side.

“It was a curious document, let me tell you, with inconsistencies and loopholes galore. A regular layman’s contract, and you know what that is—don’t you, Geoffrey?” he said to the Jolly Man.

“Don’t I, though?” the Jolly Man answered. “I never saw many of them while I was in practice, but since I’ve been on the bench they come up right along. Some of them are Chinese puzzles. When we can’t unravel ’em we always fall back on the intent of the parties, and usually have to guess at that.”

“Well, the automobile business turned out better than anybody anticipated,” Mr. Lloyd resumed. “Better even than Addison anticipated, and that was going some. He was an inventor as well as a mechanic—Addison was—and some

of the devices he invented are still on the Ellerman car. The business grew to beat the band, and all the profits were turned back into it, to enlarge the plant. During the whole three years of the contract, Richard didn't take a cent out of the concern.

"After all, Addison was only a mechanic, and by the time the three years had expired the business had got so big that it was absolutely necessary to put a business man at the head of it. . . . Richard notified Addison of the change he intended to make, and told him that he was to remain as superintendent of the plant on a salary. The salary was to be a big one, too, for Richard thought very highly of Addison's mechanical ability.

"Well, sir, Addison kicked over the traces, and there was a fearful row. He said he had a half-interest in the business—a proprietary interest—that he had put up his experience and ability against Ellerman's machine shop and thirty thousand dollars. Pure rot! I showed Addison—by that time I had become Richard's lawyer—that the contract specified half the profits. Not half interest. . . . In the end, to make a long story short, he went to law about it. The contract was pretty vague, and in several places it referred to Addison's interest as a half-interest, but in the vital clause, where this half-interest was defined, it said in clear language that a half-interest in the profits was meant."

"What was the intent of the parties?" the Jolly Man inquired.

"Why, Richard told me that he never would have dreamed of turning over a proprietary half-interest to Addison. From what I know of him I don't think he would, either. Do you, Mr. Webb?"

"No, I don't," Michael answered emphatically. "The strange thing about it is—I'm wondering how Addison ever got the notion in his head that he was entitled to a half-interest?"

"He should have had a lawyer," said the Jolly Man. "Both of them should have had—for that matter. Misunderstandings."

"I think there was a little touch of the crook in Addison," Frank Lloyd went on. "The business turned out so well that he wasn't satisfied with his original contract, and wanted to misunderstand it. He thought he could hold Richard up. That's the long and short of it. . . . But Richard never thought so. He always said that Addison must have misunderstood the terms, although he had helped in getting up the contract."

"How much did Addison's half of the profits amount to?" Michael asked.

"I'm going to tell you. He lost his first suit—for a half-interest—and then he sued for an accounting, and for his share of the profits. He claimed that the business had earned one hundred and eighty thousand dollars net in three years. This was true, but the contract specified that nothing was to be considered as profit until the needs of the plant had been provided for—new machinery, and so on. Well, literally every dollar of profits had been turned back into the the concern, and there wasn't anything at all to divide. He lost his case hands down. . . . He had a good lawyer, but he had no case.

"Dick Ellerman felt very sorry for him, and before the last case came to trial, he renewed his offer to make Addison superintendent of the plant at a salary of fifteen thousand

a year. The only result of that proposal was to make the poor fool believe we were afraid of him, and he became more determined than ever.

“Well, gentlemen, after it was all over and done Richard Ellerman did something that makes me take off my hat to him—figuratively speaking—every time I think of it. You must keep in mind as I tell you this, that these lawsuits had been carried on with the utmost bitterness. Richard was getting to be quite a public figure in Chicago at that time—not only in business, but in society, and in philanthropic work—but, like most energetic people, he had a lot of enemies. They rallied around Addison, and finally got one of the newspapers to take his side. The whole thing became a rancorous public squabble.

“However, when it was all over, Dick called me in and said—you know that half-whimsical, smiling way he’s got—well, he said, ‘You lawyers have had *your* say, and now I’m going to have mine. I want you to take this check for twenty thousand dollars and send it to Addison as a gift from me, in recognition of his three years of faithful work!’ . . . I was astounded. I reminded Dick that Addison had tried to hold him up. He said he’d forgotten that. . . . It was, gentlemen, the *squarest, whitest* thing that I’ve ever seen done in all my years of law practice. We didn’t understand bunk in those days as we do now,” he turned toward Michael and smiled.

“Evidently not,” Michael agreed.

“Or we wouldn’t have sent the check to Addison,” Mr. Lloyd continued. “It turned out that, with all his mechanical ability, Addison was something of a bunk artist. Well, in the first place, he kept the check and wrote Richard as nasty

a letter as I've ever read. He enclosed a bill for ninety thousand dollars in the letter, and credited the twenty thousand on it—and he wrote on the bill: *Please remit seventy thousand more and we will call it square.* Think of that, will you?"

"I'd call that pretty darned ungrateful," Thomas Hunter remarked, "considering that he'd lost his case, and the money was a gift."

"Well, the next thing he did was to go into the automobile business with another fellow, and they started to making a vehicle called the Addison car. Upon my word, it was an absolute duplicate of the Ellerman car, and had all our patented devices on it. . . . He was a perfect dumbbell in practical affairs. . . . Richard was very patient about this, and we spent two years fooling around, trying to get him to stop. He wouldn't do it, so we finally sued him for infringement of patents. His defence was that these devices were his own invention, and they were. . . ."

"But had he assigned them to Ellerman?" the Jolly Man gravely asked.

"He had. That was just the point . . . and for valuable consideration in each case. He lost out there, and that ended the Addison car."

3

"So that's how Dick started in the motor car game," Mr. Lloyd continued after a moment's silence.

"What became of Addison?" Michael inquired.

"I really don't know," was Mr. Lloyd's answer. "I haven't heard of Addison in ten years. He kind of petered

out, I think. The last I knew of him he was running a little garage and repair shop up around Milwaukee."

"That's a mighty—*mighty* interesting story," said Hunter gravely.

"It is indeed," Michael remarked, "and it's as full of bunk as an egg is of meat."

"Isn't that the truth," Frank Lloyd assented. "To think of Addison getting in there and trying to take half of Richard's business away from him, in spite of the fact that he was offered a big job—fifteen thousand a year, at least five times more than he ever made before—and then setting out to infringe every patent we owned. . . . But I think the outstanding feature of that controversy was the big-hearted way in which Richard sent his defeated opponent a check for twenty thousand dollars, don't you?"

"I do," replied Michael, as he said good-night, and started for his room. "I think it's almost too outstanding."

4

A quarter of an hour later Michael sat in his room alone, except for an aching conscience. The copy for his weekly column in *Humanity* was overdue. He should have written it that afternoon, but he had spent the time in dawdling around—in the library, in conversation with Miss Violet Fleming, in planning a childish treasure-hunting expedition, in listening to the early achievements of a money king.

Tomorrow—that was to be taken up in repairing Miss Merrifield's car. There would be no time for writing then.

Mournfully he slipped a sheet of paper in his portable typewriter and sat with his fingers resting lightly on the

keys. Well, what? A mental blank. If there had been an inspiration in the northwest corner of the room, where the wall joins the ceiling, he would have got it, for he gazed steadily at that corner for ten minutes. Nothing came. Still a mental blank. All possible subjects seemed trivial.

Such is the writer's hour of Gethsemane, when he feels that it would have been far, far better if he had gone in the hay and feed business with his uncle.

The real difficulty about all manner of literary composition is to get in the mood. The creation of ideas and the putting down of words on paper is not hard to do, but it is very hard to get oneself into the right frame of mind. Sitting before the blank white paper, with the clock ticking away, and his task staring at him, Michael endeavored by pleasing auto-suggestion, to put himself in a position where he could look down upon things. To attain a sense of detachment; look down upon the Rt. Hon. David Lloyd George, for instance, instead of looking up at him.

Writers always have to look down on things and people. If they look up at them—well, that's fatal. In schools where the art of literary creation is taught the very first lesson is an exercise on looking down on everybody. This makes the work very fascinating.

So Michael smoked his pipe placidly and tried to look down on Gerhardt Hauptman, the boll weevil, H. L. Mencken, aviation, the United States Senate, Edna Ferber and Charles P. Steinmetz. . . . No good. His mind kept slipping away into trivialities. At the end of a quarter of an hour he found himself reflecting on the instability of a canoe that he had hired by the week one summer at Lake Champlain.

Then he put his hands in his pockets, jingled some nickels and dimes, and tried again. Ethel Barrymore; Eugene Debs; bootleggers; what Ernest Dowson said about Cynara, "I've been faithful to you in my fashion"; radio concerts; Lord Leverhulme; Spinelly; Theatre des Mathurins; German money. "If I could ever get the confounded thing started it would keep on by itself, as it always does," he soliloquized. . . . Shakespeare, Henley Street, advertising rates, old Clemenceau, English cigars.

After a long while he suddenly took his hands from his pockets, typed "The Boiling Pot" at the head of the sheet, and went on with a droll story about Florenz Ziegfeld hiring three of the wives of ex-Sultan of Turkey for the Follies; then another about the real nature of the misunderstood Turk; and like a flash a solution of the Dardanelles question came into his head. He wrote it down hurriedly, without much examination, fearing that he would find a flaw in it. "Let the readers do that," he said to himself. "It will give their minds some exercise."

After that it was easy. One paragraph suggested another, and he was in the midst of the enormous artistic problem of ladies' hats when he heard a slight tap at the door. He stopped and looked around. A small white envelope slid in and lay on the floor. Then he heard the pattering of slippers, and another door softly closing.

5

He approached the envelope in the manner of a man drawing near a dynamite bomb. As he picked it up he caught the faint yet penetrating odor of jasmine.

The issues of the day and the course of human progress all seemed suddenly far away and diminishing in value. . . . Then they snuffed themselves out. . . . Civilization and its problems withdrew in a huff.

The note was written in a large but delicate and precise style of hand-writing. It reminded Michael of the beautifully scrawled—something-or-other—things he had seen written on parchment and sold in the bazaars in Persia. He never knew what they were, but he thought they were poems. They might have been cooking recipes. Anyway, this looked like them.

“You wonder man! I lie here in my lonely room across the hall, reading Kant, and listening to your typewriter go tap, tap, tap. So now I made you stop and think a moment of little me. And now, good-night, you wonder man.

“VIOLET.”

Michael held the note close to the light and gazed at it hard. From the grave look on his face one would have thought that it set forth the terms of some kind of judicial sentence. He was alone in a room at midnight with a jasmine-scented note. At such times men do not smile. . . . Then he held it to his face. Jasmine. He sat on the arm of his chair, and looked at it hard again.

After a moment's reflection he thrust the note in his pocket and passed his hand mechanically over his chin. “I wonder if I ought to shave,” he said to himself. “No, I don't need it,” he soliloquized, “but I'll comb my hair and brush up a bit, anyhow.”

A voice spoke—almost audibly; to Michael it was like the throb of a great bell. The voice of Soul. He had heard it many times before.

SOUL: What do you intend to do about that note?

MICHAEL: Why, I thought I'd go across the hall and call on the lady.

SOUL: This is no time to call on ladies.

MICHAEL: It's the time to call on her. She certainly expects it.

SOUL: Yes, but that is not for you. There are other things for you to do.

MICHAEL: But it doesn't make a bit of difference. Nobody will be harmed by my going.

SOUL: It's not the thing for you to do.

MICHAEL: Oh, don't be a prig. You've often told me that I'm on earth to get experience.

SOUL: You've had enough of that kind of experience. Too much.

MICHAEL: Nevertheless, I still have a sense of gallantry. Good Lord! She expects me.

SOUL: Let her expect.

MICHAEL: That's easy for you to say. You're just a soul. You don't know what it is to meet a slighted woman face to face. I've met them before.

SOUL: You have something else to do. That's all. You are to go on and do your work and be defeated and destroyed.

MICHAEL: Defeated and destroyed?

SOUL: Yes. As many better men than you have been, and you've no time to be calling on ladies at midnight.

MICHAEL: You're cheerful. Suppose I refuse to be defeated and destroyed?

SOUL: Then I'll leave you.

MICHAEL: You'll leave me without a soul?

SOUL: I'll leave you without a soul, and you'll be no better off than a small town banker.

He thought it was Soul speaking, but it was in truth the Age of Thirty-Four. . . . At that age a man does not need a paramour; he needs a wife. . . . So Soul swells with importance, grows minatory in manner, and is fertile in weighty excuses.

Michael mournfully finished the writing of the rest of his column by hand. . . . He did not know why, but for some reason which lay in his subconsciousness he did not want Miss Fleming, across the hall, to hear the tapping of his typewriter. He moved about his room with quiet steps.

Tomorrow he intended to borrow a pair of overalls at the Ellerman garage, and start early at the job of repairing Miss Merrifield's car. He was glad he had this duty before him. It could be stretched out so it would keep him away from Shadow Lawn all day.

Chapter Eighteen

The Origin of Gantisme

I

THOMAS, the Ellermans' head chauffeur, had prejudices on certain economic questions. He thought that gentlemen were entirely out of place working around automobiles—especially when there were good men on the spot who might turn an honest penny . . . you know. When Michael appeared at the garage at ten o'clock in the morning and unfolded his plan for repairing Miss Merrifield's car, and wanted to borrow a pair of overalls and some tools, Thomas looked upon his project with a gloomy eye.

He stood in the wide, cool door of the immense garage, his thumbs in the armholes of his vest, engaged in chewing. . . . He did not look at Michael as he spoke, but at a distant cloud in line with Michael's right ear. Whatever he was chewing interfered to some extent with his speech, and his talking was done through the left corner of his mouth.

"You'll get all dirty, sir," he said. "I know Miss Merrifield's car. It's good and greasy. You won't get the oil out of your hands for days and days."

"I know. That's the big idea," Michael came back cheerfully. "I like to work with my hands, and I don't mind dirt."

This preference for democratic work awakened no enthusiasm in Thomas. He did not believe in the democracy of labor. "On a pinch," he offered, "I might run over there myself, and tighten up the connecting rod bearings."

"That's kind of you; but I've nothing else to do, so I'll attend to it."

Thomas had never heard of de-bunking as a science, or of the profound scholarship and literary achievements of Michael Webb—for to him literature was as a jewel buried in a mountain. To this unlettered soul Michael was just "one of them rich guys up at the house." Now, spontaneously, and without hint or suggestion, he mentally classified Michael as a nut. . . . The perception of a nut is instinctive in all classes of society.

"Well, it's your lookout, sir. If you wanta get all greasy and het up working around a crankshaft . . . why, go ahead."

At that moment Thomas Hunter appeared on the scene. "Here's the young man who's going to help me," Michael said,—“we'd like to have a pair of overalls for him, too.”

No, Hunter couldn't go. He sweated apologies, and was afraid he had greatly disarranged Michael's plans. He said he had to write out an abstract of his plan for Mr. Ellerman's private secretary, and that it would take him all day to do it.

"My idea is that you'll find the old bus almost pounded to pieces," Thomas remarked in a funeral tone. "Miss Merrifield—she dunno nothin' about automobiles. Runs her car with the spark advanced all the time, regardless. If I've told her once I bet I've told her a dozen times the difference between advance and retard, but it's no go, sir."

"Well, I'll try to show her," Michael said. "Can you lend me the overalls, then? I suppose she has some tools, and I can use them."

"I can letcha have the overalls, I can, but they'll be pretty tight for you; and as for tools, she ain't got nothin' but a pair o' pliers and a rusty monkey wrench 'at I wouldn't stop to pick up in the road. . . . You can borrow the tools off'n me, too, but I'm charged with them tools, and if anything happens to 'em. . . ."

"Oh, I'll bring them back, sure," Michael protested, "and here's a two-case note for your trouble."

"Thank you, sir." Thomas took the two-dollar bill and solemnly deposited it in an aged pocket-book stuffed to fatness with the business cards of various automobile supply houses. "Thank you very much. Sure, I can fix you up all right. Fine and dandy. You'd better take some of this waste with you; you'll need it to wipe your hands." He hurried into the garage. "I'll bring the overalls and tools in a minute," he called out over his shoulder.

"They're all taking a lot of interest in my idea," Hunter remarked, a little proudly. "I've been talking with Mr. Ellerman's secretary, and she's greatly interested. She's a very important person in the company—she's only a private secretary in name—in fact, she's a high official."

"Miss Margolin?" Michael queried.

"Yes. Miss Margolin. A woman with brains all right. There's a *woman* for you."

"She's a woman of the kind you don't often meet," Michael agreed.

"You said it. When you talk to her there's no foolishness. She's as polite as you please, but her questions go

snap—snap—snap—one right after the other. She covers ground. Many a man could take lessons from her.”

“Some of them do, I’m sure.”

“Yes, sir, she’s a power . . . and I’ll bet when she doesn’t like a man she’s dangerous.”

“I suppose she is,” Michael agreed. “I—I—wh——,” he caught sight of Miss Violet Fleming and Bingo Ellerman approaching the garage, walking slowly, and talking with their heads close together. “She’s not half as dangerous to me, though, as that woman coming this way,” he said—and turning toward the interior of the garage he inquired hastily how long it would take to get the overalls and tools.

Hunter looked upon these manœuvres with wonderment. “I’ll be going. See you later,” he said, and departed, unable to make head or tail of Michael’s startled manner.

“Good morning, professor,” Bingo sang out to Michael, “what’s the big noise to-day? Why the overalls? Going to spoil somebody’s perfectly good motor car?”

“Oh, hello,” Michael said in a manner that had a touch of hurried abstraction in it. He wanted to get away. “Hello . . . good morning, Miss Fleming. I’m going to do a little work on Miss Merrifield’s car. I’m late now, as it is.”

“So that’s the idea, eh,” Bingo continued. “You’re trying to build up a little practice in the neighbourhood as a mechanic. Well, I wish you luck.”

Thomas grinned, and thought Bingo’s sarcasm was well-placed.

“Vi and I are going to run around in one of the cars this morning,” Bingo went on. “Come on, Thomas, let’s get out the Stutz. . . . See this guy”—he took Miss Flem-

ing familiarly by the shoulder and pointed to Michael—"I'll leave you with him while I'm getting the car ready. But I warn you . . . mentally he may be all right, but morally he's nothing but just a bad case of measles. Be on your guard." Bingo disappeared in the garage.

"It was so thoughtful of you to send me that little good-night note," Michael began, the overalls and tools under his arm. "I appreciated it."

"I must have been crazy when I did it," Miss Fleming came back promptly. Her manner did not warm the atmosphere.

"Oh, don't say that," Michael began, "you have no idea how it cheered me up."

"Oh, it did? I was afraid I merely interrupted you in your important work." She turned her back and became absorbed in the display of tools.

"Yes, I slept with your note under my pillow." (The liar!)

"You didn't deserve so much attention; you're spoiled." She turned around and glanced at him impudently.

"I know I didn't deserve it," he came back. "That's why I appreciated it so much. I thought of going across the hall and whispering good-night to you through a tiny crack in your door."

Miss Fleming let her eyes rest a second on his face. There was a sweeping, caressing movement in her glance. Her bearing was decidedly less frigid. "Oh," she laughed, "you take it out in good intentions, don't you? . . . Well, you mustn't let your kind intentions toward Miss Merrifield fade away. . . . She's probably waiting for you right now—to work on her car. You'd better go."

As Michael went away he mentally patted himself on the back and thought he had come out of the encounter fairly well, after all.

2

Miss Merrifield's life was spent in doing small things while she thought about big ones. She was a Puritan with a smothered creative impulse; a slave to an aimless, sterile sense of duty. A moralist who has no faith in morals, but is nevertheless addicted to them as to a drug.

Over this cloudy spiritual composition was laid the bright enamel of a penetrating French culture. France is not afraid to kiss beauty in the face. She liked that. She told Michael that she loved France and the French, but love is not the right word. She only envied them. One may envy the joy of a beautiful child in velvet and lace who splashes in a muddy pool, capturing tadpoles and silvery minnows with shouts of laughter. That is France. Edith Merrifield sat high on the cliffs and looked on. She was afraid to take off her shoes and stockings.

Her inner life was troubled by a dissonance of thought and feeling. Her ideas lay around her in scattered pieces, without cohesion. She did not understand herself. Self-understanding is the rarest of human faculties, and most women seem to be incapable of acquiring it without the help of a man. A man's love—even a man's sympathy—has, through some obscure psychic chemistry, a catalytic transforming effect on the lives of women.

But life does not pause on account of people not understanding themselves. It moves. So Edith went on sewing

window curtains, reading books, giving teas, going to teas, helping Marguerite with her cooking and trying to teach her the English language, going to hear "Samson and Delilah," patronizing Carnegie Hall, and driving in her car over country roads redolent with summer.

Such a nature needs only a spark to bring its chaotic elements to the point of fusion. With a man the fusing spark may be a new idea, success, defeat, love, achievement, danger—any one of many things. With a woman it is almost invariably love.

A normal woman does not reach the age of thirty without loving a man. Edith had loved two or three—faintly. These faint perturbations had an early demise. A gentle soul with quick perceptions, Edith saw through these men too readily to be thrilled deeply by them. Hollow drums, tinkling cymbals, *faiseurs des phrases*—commonly known as fluffs. . . . And men without a past. A young girl may love a man without a past, but it is too much to expect of a mature woman.

So now Michael Webb presents himself, overalls and tools under his arm, and an apology for being late on his tongue. . . . Miss Merrifield did not know Michael as well as you do. His instinctive capacity for playing the fool had not yet been demonstrated before her. It is well that she has a sense of humor. She'll need it.

3

Michael was as deliberate as a plumber who works by the hour. He slowly laid out his tools on the running board. Miss Merrifield sat down among them, and said,

"I'm going to watch you work. Maybe I can help, too. Hold something for you, perhaps."

"Oh, you can help me very nicely by just sitting around where I can look at you."

Conversation. The Ellermans . . . Shadow Lawn . . . Dobbs Ferry . . . dogwood blossoms . . . Washington Irving . . . Major Andre . . . the American Revolution . . . the plays of Sacha Guitry . . . the plays of Luigi Pirandello . . . apple trees. Conversation that began tremendously, and sounded at the start like a university under full steam, and then trickled away to important topics like the difficulty of getting real orange marmalade.

After a while Michael began briskly to arrange his tools again. "What are you doing that for?" Miss Merrifield asked.

"I don't know what I'm doing it for," he replied, "but it's the thing to do. I've studied mechanics practically. When sent for to do a job, a practical mechanic always arranges his tools; then he smokes a pipe; and after that he arranges them over and in a different manner. Then he discovers that an important tool is missing, so that means another trip back to the shop."

"But that's bunk, *pure bunk*," Miss Merrifield remarked with a jolly laugh. "I thought you were entirely free from bunk, as you are the great de-bunking specialist."

"Oh, no, you're mistaken," Michael answered quickly. "I'm subject to attacks of bunk like anyone else. Physicians are not immune to disease." He shook his head in protest at any such erroneous idea. "It's a wonder that I'm not full of bunk, being exposed to it, as I am, in my work—some of it in its most virulent form, too."

Just at that moment Marguerite came into the orchard and told her mistress that luncheon was ready.

4

On fine days Edith Merrifield had a table spread on the terrace that ran along the side of the house. There she usually sat alone, eating with unconscious, graceful gestures and pondering over a book.

Sometimes she spent a half an hour listening to Marguerite, who spoke of America in terms of amazement and resignation. The vast sea of the English language threatened to overwhelm the simple servant. The strangeness. The people. The customs. The language. Her emotion was that of wonder. Like Marco Polo in the regions of the Great Chan of Tartary, she was prepared to see almost anything happen. Yet some things happened for which she was not prepared.

Marguerite had many virtues. She was a Norman, and knew how to make *crème confiture à la galette* as it is made in all that country of rolling hills which stands with its shoulder to the northern sea. This is an art that can redeem a race, as the knack of inlaying silver redeemed those of Damascus from an early oblivion.

Michael and Edith talked to each other with the easy unconcern of old friends. A conversation as fluid as running water. One step from Marguerite and Dobbs Ferry to St. Germain-en-Laye and the Forest of Fontainebleau, and from that to the intricacies of railroad time-tables.

"It's a pity we didn't know each other in France," Michael said. "We might have gone around together a bit. I was

at St. Germain-en-Laye while you were there, but I didn't know——”

“And we had to come back to Dobbs Ferry to get acquainted,” Edith took up the thread of conversation. “It's strange, isn't it? Have sugar in your coffee?” She uncovered a sugar bowl of hammered silver.

“No, I don't take sugar. Thanks. I add too much weight when I use it. . . . Yes, we could have seen a little of Paris together, maybe.”

“I was just thinking of that,” Edith said. “Wouldn't it have been lovely? Then I could have seen ever so much in Paris that I didn't see. . . . Nobody to go with—I mean, nobody who would have been interested—and interesting. . . . I've never even been to the Café de la Rotonde. Would you believe it? That shows how little I've poked around.”

“Café de la Rotonde?” repeated Michael vaguely. “Which one? There are two. One out Montparnasse way, and one back of the Opera. Rue de la Fayette.”

“I mean the one out beyond the Montparnasse station. Oh, you know! There's where the literary people go.”

“You missed nothing,” he said. “It's most disappointing. The food's poor. The place is rather sloppy, and the literary people are—well, just literary people, such as you can see any day around New York. Mostly Americans and English—very few French. . . . My regular hang-out was the Boulevard Clichy. There's where I absorbed my French culture. You don't have to be a high-brow on the Boulevard Clichy. You get culture as easily as drawing up a frosted sarsaparilla through a straw. . . . Painless culture, it's called.”

“The Boulevard Clichy!” said Edith in surprise. “I've

never heard of that section of Paris as being identified with any form of culture. What——”

“Oh, yes. It’s identified with the Boulevard Clichy form of culture. You know the boulevard, don’t you? You’ve seen it, I mean?”

“Surely, I’ve been through it. It’s up on the hill. I didn’t see anything there but sidewalk cafés and those cunning little French shops. And shows—little shows—theatres, aren’t they?”

“No, they’re *café chantants*. Everybody eats cheese and pastry and drinks wine; and there’s an entertainment—and poems are read and songs are sung . . . why, good gracious, it’s worth going to France to hear Aristide Bruant recite. You’ll not find him on the Boulevard Clichy, though. He is the star of a café on the Boulevard Rochecouart. He’s the poet of the people, you know. The poets around the Etoile look down upon him, I suppose—but he looks down upon them in turn—so what does it matter? . . . I’ve heard him recite his great lyric—*Chi-dans-l’eau*.”

“*Chi-dans-l’eau*,” — Miss Merrifield looked puzzled. “What’s that?”

“That means *sailor*,” he explained.

She shook her head in doubt. “It doesn’t mean sailor in my kind of French.”

“Well, it means sailor on the Boulevard Clichy,” he asserted. “We learn folk songs there, too.”

She treated him to a whimsical laugh.

“Don’t laugh at me,” he said in an aggrieved tone. “I’m trying to entertain you with my experiences.”

“Oh. I’m not laughing at you,” she came back quickly. “I’m laughing with you. You’re as French as anyone can

be. Possibly you don't know it. That's why I laughed. A Frenchman in intellect."

"I've suspected it. I didn't know it. Suspected it, though, for some time."

"You are, indeed," she continued. "You're more French than the French themselves, with your de-bunking and your clear way of looking at things. You detest pretence. I like that . . . a lot."

"I'm glad you like it. A good many don't. Some hate my de-bunking like poison."

"Oh, I'm for it," said Miss Merrifield with enthusiasm. "You said the other evening that the science of de-bunking is the science of reality. I think that's fine, and I'm one of your converts, or disciples, or whatever you call them. . . . It's splendid to look at everything with the eyes of truth, and see it just as it is."

Michael was impressed. He did not often make converts. Most people hate reality, and go far out of their way to escape from it. "I am certainly proud of having made a convert," he said. "It's a rare occurrence."

5

Marguerite came out on the terrace bearing a single cigar reposing on a folded napkin. They had bought a cigar for him! It was a heavy, dry-looking product, with a green band around it, and the name *Snow-Bird* was printed on the band. Marguerite explained that it was the best cigar of twenty-five cents to be found at the shop of the merchant of tobacco in the village—and was highly esteemed.

"Oh, Snow-Bird's my regular choice," said the liar, as he

cut off the end and lighted it. His inward conviction was that the *marchand de tabac* had charged Marguerite twenty cents too much. How nice these women were—he reflected—to think of getting him a cigar. He could see them wondering what sort of cigar he would like, and deciding on Snow-Bird.

“You were going to tell me about the folk-songs,” Miss Merrifield reminded him, “and the literary atmosphere of the Boulevard Clichy.”

“Oh, yes,” he said reflectively. “Let’s see. . . . Have you ever heard the Capitaine Peri-en-mé?”

“No, I haven’t.”

“Well, it’s a Breton folk-poem. Capitaine Peri-en-mé means Capitaine Peri-en-mer.”

“Did you learn this one in Brittany?” Edith asked.

“No, I learned it in the Boulevard Clichy. Everything comes there, you know—everything worth while. . . . They recite it impressively . . . everybody stamps his feet on the floor and recites the chorus. It sounds fine. This is the way it goes—

“Quand minuit sonne en Finisterre,
Et lon lon la, et lon lon laire!
Dans la nuit on entend des pas,
Et lon lon laire, et lon lon la!

“C’est lui qu’arrive à pas pressés
Et lon lon laire, et lon lon lait!
Tout droit d’la baie des trépassés,
Et lon lon laire, et lon lon lait!

“Tremblez les gars! tremblez les garces!
Et lon lon la, et lon lon larce!
Le vent souffle à travers les ifs!
Et lon lon laire, et lon lon lif!

“Dans le chemin-creux, embrumé,
V’la l’capitaine peri-en-mé!”

“Ghosts?” Miss Merrifield interrupted. “I don’t like ghosts.”

“Well, this is a nice ghost. You’ll like this one. It goes on:

“Tous les chiens hurlent dans leur niches!
Et lon lon laire, et lon lon liches!”

“No, I don’t like any kind of ghosts, even nice ones,” she said positively. “It’s lovely, but the subject’s poor. Haven’t you got something *plus gai*?”

“Oh, sure,” Michael laughed. “I have others. I’ll give you a specimen of Gantisme. That’s the latest school of poetry. Comes from *gant*, a glove, you know. In these poems the words fit the subject as tightly as a glove fits the hand. The idea’s great, isn’t it?”

“It sounds compact,” she agreed. “Where did you learn about Gantisme. On the Boulevard Clichy, I suppose?”

“No. I learned this on the Rue Blanche. The distinguishing feature of this school is that when constructing a poem there mustn’t be any scraps, or litter, left over. You use just enough words to say what you’re going to say—and then you stop. Every poem is called a *gant*. Want to hear a *gant*?”

“I certainly do,” she replied. “Then a book of poems is called a box of gloves, isn’t it?”

“Precisely. A box of gloves. Here is a sample *gant*!

“Il s’appelait Rondibé,
Elle s’appelait Radada.
Il etait natif du Thibet
Elle etait native de Blida!

Quand elle rencontra Rondibé,
Quand il rencontra Radada,
Elle lui dit: Viens chez moi, bébé;
Il lui repondit: A dada.’”

“Oh, what a whimsical person you are,” she was so taken with laughter that she could hardly speak. “You play with everything so that I never know when you’re in earnest. . . .”

“I don’t, either,” Michael agreed.

“But that was just a childish rhyme,” she insisted.

Michael kept a serious face. “No, it isn’t,” he firmly asserted. “It’s Gantisme. It’s a big literary movement. By next year it will be over here, and all those in our bright young literary set will be—will be——”

“Glove-makers,” she suggested.

“Well, we’ll call ’em *gantistes*—it sounds better.”

“I can see marvelous possibilities in it when it gets here,” she said. “We’ve got a lot of material already. Emily Dickinson was a *gantiste*——”

“I never heard of the lady,” Michael remarked.

“No? She was an American poet. She probably didn’t know it, but she was a *gantiste*. Listen to this:

“‘Papa above! Regard a mouse
Overpowered by the cat
Reserve within thy Kingdom
A mansion for the rat!’”

“‘Snug in seraphic cupboards
To nibble all the day,
While unsuspecting cycles
Wheel pompously away.’”

How’s that? Wouldn’t that fit in with the movement?”

“Hurrah for Emily Dickinson,” Michael exclaimed. “We’ll build the American section of the *Gantiste* movement around her name.”

(This is historical. Despite all contradiction, this is how and where the *Gantiste* movement began in this country. Amy Lowell did not join it until it was nearly six months old. Let the polemics rage. The facts we have given here should stand, fixed and unmovable, above the battle of controversy, like a rock in a stormy sea.)

Chapter Nineteen

The Enchanted Garden

I

FOR two hours in the afternoon Michael lay on his back under the car, reaching up through the oily darkness of the crank case and fumbling with bolts which he could not see. His hands, and his arms up to the elbows, were covered with buttery black oil; and there were splatterings of grease on his face, and streaks of it on the chauffeur's overalls.

Edith Merrifield was appalled at the amount of drudgery in the job—she had fancied that it was something for a quarter of an hour's light exercise—and she was anxious to do something to help. But what can a girl in a clean gingham kitchen dress do around a crankshaft? Especially when she doesn't know the difference between a crankshaft and a generator brush. . . . So she sat on the grass by one of the front wheels and talked with Michael at intervals.

"You said the other day that you love machinery," she said. "Now I really believe you."

"I do," came in a muffled tone from under the car. "I love machinery—in a way. Its precise motions are so fascinating to me as the processes of a finely geared, logical mind." With grimy hands he pulled himself out on the

grass. She gave one look at his grease-smearred arms and reached for the cotton waste. When she had finished with one arm she took another, and finally he looked fairly decent.

He lay on his back resting, and puffing cigarette smoke straight upward toward the sky.

"I wish I really knew something about gears and pistons and such things," she remarked. "I feel as ignorant as a child in this roaring age of machinery."

"Oh, I wouldn't let that worry me," Michael said, blowing a smoke ring in the direction of the stars.

"But this civilization was made by machinery, and is sustained by it," she continued. "Therefore, everyone ought to be——"

"A machinist!" he laughed and finished her sentence in his own way. "Yes," he continued lightly, "this age was made by machinery and it will be destroyed by it. Destroyed as certainly as Rome was destroyed by—by . . . by whatever Rome was destroyed by. I'm not much on history."

"Rome was destroyed by the barbarians of the north," Edith announced in the affirmative manner of a history teacher in a high school.

"Well, this Rome of to-day will be destroyed by the barbarians of machinery. The machine will wreck this age."

"How? I don't think I understand," she asked. "We use machinery to serve us."

"No. That's just it. It both serves and dominates us." Michael leaned on his elbow and idly plucked at blades of grass. "We're gradually allowing machinery to dominate humanity. It has become the instrument and symbol of capitalism. We are making the machine more important than the man. How? . . . I'll tell you. Consider, first,

what any machine is. It is only an extension of a human faculty. It has no other virtue. This monkey wrench is an extension of the finger and thumb; it multiplies their gripping power. The automobile is a magnification of the human power of locomotion; it has circular feet. Very striking—that. I mean the idea of circular, revolving feet.

“Keeping this conception of machinery in mind, one would naturally think that the development of machines would have the effect of greatly increasing the dignity and prestige of the worker; it gives him such marvelous capacity for production. Just think of it! A Flemish weaver in the Middle Ages was able to produce about ten yards of cloth a day at a hand loom; to-day weavers in our cotton mills attend to ten looms—I mean looms where there is an automatic shuttle-feed—and produce five hundred yards of cloth a day. Yet, the wages of modern weavers are about the same in purchasing power as those of the craftsmen of medieval Flanders.

“And—more than that!” he continued. “Through the strange hocus-pocus that pervades our life the worker at the machine has become its servant instead of its master. . . . Machines don’t adapt themselves to men, but men have to adapt themselves to machines.”

“The human body is a machine itself,” Edith said. “The most beautiful and flexible of all.”

“Yes, so it is—but under our industrial system the human being is considered of less value than the inanimate mechanism. The only reason for the existence of the worker is his adaptability to the machine. . . .”

“What a curious thought that is!” she exclaimed. “I never saw it in that light before.” He had uttered those

opinions lying on his back, his face smudged with grease, and as he talked he made gestures toward the sky.

"It isn't a question of how fine the worker's spirit may be, how good a citizen he is, or what is his human value—no, the only question is what can he do to satisfy a machine? Unless he can adapt himself to the requirements of a machine there is no place for him. Can he keep pace with it if it is speeded up? Can he feed it fast enough? Can he be a satisfactory valet to it, and keep it in good order? This may be fine for industry, but it's rather destructive to humanity. The industrialist—and, in fact, the whole world—considers the machine more valuable than the man.

"Then, to hasten this destructive process we have developed the science of routine efficiency, with an immense subdivision of factory labor. Do you understand what I mean?"

"Certainly," she replied. "You mean that one person does one little thing, and then passes the work on to someone else."

"Yes, that's it," he continued. "Efficiency. It is one of the most evil ideas that have ever come into American life. In the Ford factory in Detroit I saw a man who does nothing else all day—in fact, his whole life long—but pick up one iron rod after another and hold it under a punch. Just spending his life picking up rods and laying them down. . . . And, in a pickle factory I saw a woman who sat on a stool all day and filled little glass jars with mustard. The jars came along on an endless belt and she had to move fast to keep up. She was a wonder, and did the work of two women who had been formerly employed. The proprietor of the factory was so perverted by efficiency

that he always took visitors to see her work. It was—and is, I suppose—one of the sights of the establishment. The only trouble about it was—as the son of the proprietor told me—that she had a habit of getting drunk, and was usually away on Mondays. Home drunk, you know.”

“Poor thing!”

“Yes. Poor thing she was. Can a race enslaved like that make good citizens? I should say not. Its tendency is to make human existence a senseless phenomenon, without joy or aim.”

“Oh, I know you’re right,” she exclaimed. “Certainly one naturally likes to create things—to feel that one has done all the work in something, say in making a pair of shoes. I know that.”

“Yes,” Michael continued. “And a man who spends his life holding a rod under a punching machine is defeated to his very soul. He never creates anything. He simply exists.”

Miss Merrifield started to say something, but checked herself. For the past ten minutes her attention had been attracted by a man loitering in the road outside the gate. He had passed several times, and every time he passed he stared intently at the automobile and at Michael underneath it. Once or twice he appeared to be about to enter the garden, but changed his mind.

She called Michael’s attention to the man and they both stood up.

“Why, it’s Captain Dixon,” she said in surprise. “You know, he has the store in the village. It surely is. He put in our window screens. I’ve never seen him look so strange. I wonder why he doesn’t come in?”

"Oh," Michael said explosively. "Oh, I know. He wants to see me. We've a little business together. He thinks he might be out of place in here. . . . Just excuse me a moment, please." Michael walked to the gate, and Edith saw him and the Captain talking together. She sat down on the grass and opened her book.

Michael was gone for a quarter of an hour. He went out in the road and she lost sight of him.

2

When he came back in the walled garden it seemed to him that some fantastic change had come over the scene. The sky was light green, and what he had thought were apple trees were now palms, with their crested fronds rising against a sky of jade. As he dragged himself with heavy feet up the walk a gorgeous tropical bird swam swiftly through the air, its colors vermilion, white and turquoise, and lighted on the rocky cliff that he had foolishly taken for a house of the Italian villa type.

No, he was wrong. It was a house, but it was a cliff, too. Both at the same time . . . and the palms were apple trees—and palms, too. The bird was clearly a robin, but it looked like a cockatoo.

This was all puzzling, and defied scientific explanation.

Where was the woman? He had lost her. Ah, how foolish he had been! One should not leave women alone in savage lands. Too dangerous. . . . But there she was. Placidly sitting on the grass. And beside her was a monstrous beast. No, no. How absurd! It was an automobile. But was it? No—Michael had seen too many automobiles

to be deceived. This was some primeval beast—huge, threatening, malign.

He was befuddled. Something queer had happened to him. He didn't know . . . two currents of thought ran through his mind, side by side. Everything looked like itself, and also like something else that was wholly different.

"Is this an enchanted garden?" he asked feebly.

"Oh, no," came her beautiful, golden voice. "You're the only magician here, and if it's enchanted, you did it."

He stood irresolutely before her. . . . The monstrous beast had eyes as large as plates, and it wore spectacles. He had a notion to attack it at once, but he remembered that a man had done something of the kind once in Spain, and his name would go down to generations yet unborn as that of a prize jackass. No—he thought—let it make the first move. . . . It had gray feet, and its expression was mild. . . . At any rate, he resolved to defend this woman if it cost him his life. He liked her.

"You'd better sit down," she said. "You look tired."

At that moment there came a call from a near-by hill top. A roaring of words in a voice that had roared on a quarter-deck. It filled the garden with its hum.

"What in the world is that?" Miss Merrifield asked, vividly curious.

"It's the Cap'n," Michael answered. "He's keeping in touch with me. What'd he say?"

Then the roar came again—from far away. It said:

"Oh, ho! For the flying spray and the scudding sail!"

Michael put his hands to his mouth, trumpet-wise, and roared back:

"And the rolling surf and the blue lagoon."

"You see," he explained to Edith, as he sat clumsily by her side, "the Cap'n wanted me to see—to see—what'd I say? Oh, yes, to see 'im home, but I couldn't—couldn't—no, never think of it—couldn't leave you, so he's steering home, and keeping in touch—touch—understand?"

"The Captain's not a good man for you to know," she said gravely.

Michael spread a handkerchief solemnly over Edith's shoulder. "What's that for?" she inquired, looking first at him and then at the handkerchief.

"Your lord is a-weary," he replied, "and would rest. I don't wanta ruin—ruin pretty frock." Thereupon he laid his head on her shoulder. Some Roman—it may have been Marcus Aurelius—said that the art of civilization is the capacity for never being surprised. Miss Edith Merrifield was civilized. She did not move. She only smoothed his hair with her hand.

"My manners are not good, 'scuse me," he muttered. "I know manners poor—improve, maybe—not good."

"Your manners are pretty crude," she said, "but don't improve them. People will be so astonished at meeting a human being that they will not think of your manners."

Now, the distant voice hummed through the garden again. This time farther away.

"Death li-ies close to a pot of go-o-old,"

it sang. Michael raised his head and shouted in long, tremulous notes:

"Dead men's tales are nev-er to-old."

He laid his head on her shoulder again and snuggled down like a tired child.

"This is the silliest thing I ever heard of," she said.

"Silliest thing I ever heard of, too," he murmured.

"You are just a little child——"

Michael raised his head quickly. "I thought you said I was a great big boy," he complained, and cuddled back against her shoulder.

"I did," Edith retorted, "but I made a mistake in the age. Four years old, I should say."

3

The captain's voice, no longer like a fog-horn, piped from a great distance,

"Wire, brier, lim-ber lo-ock."

"What'd he say?" Michael raised his head an inch.

"I don't know. Pay no attention to him," Edith replied. "You'd better take a little nap."

"Wire, brier, limber-er lo-ock."

floated in the air with a faint echo against some wooded hill.

"I've lost my voice," Michael said. "Won't you please get up and call out as loud as you can—*Sixteen geese in a flock?* Just say that—loud and clear—*Sixteen geese in a flock.*"

"I'll do nothing of the kind," she answered. "You can be silly if you want to, but——"

"I don't want to offend the Captain," Michael said in an aggrieved tone. "He carries a powerful magic."

"I see he does, and you're not to have anything more to do with him." As he closed his eyes she wiped the grease from his hands with her handkerchief.

"What under the sun has happened," she reflected. "I've seen this man only three times, and here he is sleeping on my shoulder."

It was the enchanted garden.

4

These strange doings may appear unaccountable to some of our readers, but not to those who can spell their riddle. We speak in symbols; we are a dervish whirling through the vast Kaballah of modern life. It was a time of dire portents. The great republic was becalmed in the doldrums. People were peevish. Hooch was poorer in quality and higher in price than it has ever been before or since. The national intellect had dried up at the source. The human spirit had oozed away. Men were stampeded in maddened masses. Even to this day, around the roaring Christmas logs, people sit and talk of that dreadful time.

5

The repairs on the car were not finished that day. In the cool dusk Michael went back to Shadow Lawn, after having been given tea and cake. He was crestfallen and annoyed at himself, and he heartily hoped that Captain Dixon's treasure expedition would be attacked by pirates, or sea serpents, or something. . . . He hated to think of what Miss Merri-

field thought of him . . . and had he known what she really thought he would have felt better. . . . As she went around her house after he had gone she experienced a curious and strange sort of exaltation.

Chapter Twenty

The Ellerman Method

I

RICHARD ELLERMAN'S official connection with the gigantic corporation which bore his name and which he controlled, was slender and evasive. He was not even an officer of the company. In its hierarchy his name appeared only as one of the fifteen directors composing the Board. To newspaper interviewers he had said frequently that he had nothing to do with the company's policy, except in a "general way, you know; as a member of the Board I have a vote." . . . On the company's books he was represented as holding less than one-tenth of the corporation's stock—the rest of his five hundred thousand shares being voted through trust companies and dummies.

He was permeated with the innate, instinctive trickiness of the second-rate mind. In America this trickiness has been sublimated into a science and is looked upon with overpowering respect. It is called shrewdness. No doubt our observant and penetrating readers have seen this spirit shining through the daily newspapers, in such headlines as. . . . Soul of Tricky Lawyer Enters Heaven. . . . Clever Lying Saves Financier. . . . Shrewd Clergyman Proves That Christ Didn't Mean What He Said. . . .

In the Congressional investigations of the relations between capital and labor, Richard Ellerman's cleverness shone as a beacon of inspiration to men of lesser gifts. He did not know what wages were paid in the Ellerman plant, or what anything cost. His memory was a vague mist. There had been a strike once, he recalled, but he could not remember what it was about, or how it was settled. He created an impression of being naïvely uninformed—in fact, half-witted—and his attitude under examination was considered extremely shrewd. . . .

After his encounter with his son, and the incident of the torn card of Thomas Houghton Hunter, the senior Ellerman turned toward his office in the west wing of the house. He entered it smiling. He was in a jolly humor, and a hot-house carnation in the lapel of his finely tailored coat gave an air of youth to his pleasant manner.

This office was the nerve center of the far-flung Ellerman enterprise, and it was as modest and inconspicuous as nerve centers usually are. . . . With brains it's different. They are loud and garish. . . . The brains of the Ellerman Motor Car Company occupied four floors of a steel-and-stone building on the lake front in Chicago. Four floors of brains, typewriters, keen-faced executives, advertising matter, efficiency experts, letter files, and men with a punch. . . . From this building a strand of wire dangled and trailed across the country, and came to an end finally in the room which Richard Ellerman had just entered. At that moment the Shadow Lawn end of the wire was being used by B. M., who was talking at it with softness and precision.

At Ellerman, Illinois, and in the Chicago storehouse of brains, B. M. was conventionalized as a symbol for dyna-

mite. B. M.'s full name was Beatrice Margolin. She was Mr. Ellerman's private secretary . . . a thirty-five-year-old woman with flat, chilly blue eyes, a sallow face, tarnished dull brown hair, a beautiful and simple office dress, and the salary of two vice-presidents.

B. M. was an intellectual robot—a mechanism of big business without heart, hate, passion, love, or fear. Her knowledge was uncanny and discouraging. She knew more about the Ellerman Company than any other person living. Her letters beginning "Mr. Ellerman directs me to say," and ending "B. M.," carried joy and terror to the hearts of men far away.

It was known to the "wise" people in the organization that Richard Ellerman rarely did anything in connection with the company without consulting her, and it was also known that sometimes for weeks on end she alone made all the decisions. Her signature to communications on company affairs was as authoritative as that of Ellerman himself. Expert bootlickers on the company's staff thought they saw an opening in this state of things; some of them even wrote her subtly conceived love-letters. She threw the love-letters away, and had the writers transferred to the South American territory.

What was the strange force stirring within this creature? She had no social life—didn't care for it. She was highly intelligent, but she read nothing but the reports of the company's officers. She appeared to have no sympathy, yet she attended church alone and quietly every Sunday, with a beautifully bound prayer-book in her hand; and her modest checks to various charities were sent as regularly as the calendar. She was a healthy and mature female, but the

imagination is baffled when it tries to picture her in love, or in a state of tousled and orgiastic abandon.

While B. M. talked gently over the private wire to Chicago Richard Ellerman strolled around the office, idly picking up things and laying them down, and whistling in a tone of whispers, "*Hello, my baby; hello, my lady; hello, my rag-time gal! If you refuse me—you will lose me; hello, my rag-time gal!*" When he was a young man this idiotic thing had been a popular song—and it clung to his memory.

With his hands clasped behind his back he stood, teetering on his toes, before a framed certificate on the wall. At its head it bore the spread eagle of the United States Government, and at its foot a red seal with a pendant blue ribbon. He looked at it affectionately; it certified to his service, during the whole period of the Great War, as a dollar-a-year man at the head of one of the government bureaus in Washington. His mind filled with pride and patriotism; his bureau had been a conspicuous success. Not that he had done much of the actual work personally—that had not been necessary—but he had taken one of the live executives from the Ellerman office, brought him down to Washington and with a friendly pat on the shoulder he had said: "Now, MacKellar, this whole thing is up to you and me. We've got to make good. Go to it" . . . MacKellar did go to it—and there was the certificate on the wall. The selection of MacKellar was a wonderful bit of man-picking, he thought, as he gazed at the parchment accolade of service well done.

He looked at Miss Margolin. Still telephoning. Slim, fresh-looking, and from the back she seemed to be a girl of twenty. Now, and a thousand times before, he wondered

if any man had ever made love to her; if she were really as virtuous as she appeared to be. . . . What the deuce? How queer life is. In a fumbling way his mind fingered around the intricate puzzle of love and sex as he stared at Miss Margolin's lithe and pliant back. Virtue. Vice. Love. What fantastic ideas people have about such things! He could not imagine how a woman could reach the age of thirty-five without having had a lover. That is, of course, unless she had a husband. It wasn't human. . . . Yet he felt, in his heart, that Miss Margolin had never. . . . Well, some quixotic idea of repression; of purity. Rats!

Then it buzzed into his mind that he knew a little something about Miss Margolin, the frigid thinking machine, that nobody else knew. . . . She could be approached. The thought sent a momentary flush over his whole body. . . . Sometime ago—it must have been three years ago—he drank champagne all the afternoon, and came in the office just before five o'clock. She was sitting there alone, plain-looking, but as cool and fresh as a simple flower growing in a dusky shadow. A thrill of desire had run through him as fire runs through dry grass. Without a word he had walked behind her, drew her head back and kissed her squarely, and at the same time his hand had gone plunging rudely through the flimsy laces around her bosom. He recollected clearly her startled "Oh's" and smothered resistance as she vainly tried to push him away with her long, delicate hands. . . . Then, as suddenly as the snapping of a twig, she gave in altogether, and putting her arms around his neck, she laid her lips against his and kissed him for . . . a long time . . . minutes.

That same day, shortly afterward, he sat in his heavy leather chair and tried to fasten his mind on some papers she had handed him. He remembered that she stood at his side, and her hand played with his hair. . . . Next morning his head was clearer, and he was annoyed at himself. He had never kissed her again, or mentioned the matter. Nor had she. . . . Ah, but she could be approached, in spite of her aspect of uncompromising virtue.

Now, as he turned from the War Service certificate and gazed at her, he felt a desire to fondle her a little—not in earnest, but in play, as a kitten rolls a ball. . . . No, never. It would never do. She was too valuable to be the object of a silly sentiment. He mustn't complicate matters. . . . Besides, she was downright homely—in very truth she was—and lean and angular.

2

He heard a click as B. M. hung up the receiver. "Anything new, this morning, Miss Margolin?" he said, turning around quickly.

"No, not much," she replied. There was a glass of milk on her desk, covered by a saucer. She took off the saucer, drank a sip of milk, and put the saucer back. "Lowrey seems to be doing you some good," she went on in a flat metallic voice. "You look much lighter than you did a month ago. Have a better color, too."

"Yes, I feel fine. All except that pain in my back, and it's better. I've actually lost ten pounds. Lowrey's a wonder."

Lowrey was a physical instructor—a thing of knotted

muscles that Ellerman had employed, and who had been installed in a gymnasium on the second floor of the Shadow Lawn garage for a month or so.

Miss Margolin handed him casually two or three unopened letters marked "Personal" on the envelopes. He opened them with slow deliberation, tearing off the ends of the envelopes, withdrawing the folded sheets and carefully spreading them out.

"Mr. Gregory will be up here on Friday," said Miss Margolin. "Friday morning at eleven. I'll notify Mr. Hunter—and will you be here, sure?"

"Gregory?" her employer repeated vaguely, holding a half-read letter in suspended animation while he looked at her in a vacant manner. This empty stare was habitual with him. At times he did not seem to understand what was going on. . . . When he was a boy he used to gaze at the wall so long and so intently—on occasions—that his mother had to shake him violently by the shoulder to arouse him.

"Yes, Mr. Gregory. The tall, thin man. . . . *Consultant to the automotive industry.*" Miss Margolin quoted Mr. Gregory's self-assumed title in a tone of emphatic sarcasm.

"Oh, sure. Edward Gregory. Yes, yes, Gregory," he said rapidly. "For a moment I didn't know what Gregory you meant. Did you send him Hunter's papers?"

"I did," she replied. "Day before yesterday. This morning he telephoned that he'd like to come up Friday for our conference. . . . He has probably had the plan copied by this time."

"You're a suspicious person," Ellerman said. "I'd hate to be as suspicious as you." This thought appeared, for some reason, to arouse his sense of humor, and he whistled a

jolly tune while he read his letters. B. M. paid no attention to these manifestations. She took another cat-like sip of milk, and sat with her hands clasped around her slim knee.

"You know why I selected Edward Gregory to consult with us, don't you?" Ellerman suddenly asked. . . . "Of course," she answered, and her thin lips parted in a smile, but there was no smile in her cold, opaque eyes. Then she leaned over her desk and tittered with amusement. Ellerman's stout sides bulged with laughter. . . . There was some unspoken joke passing back and forth between them.

Unspoken. That was the strong tie that held these two people so closely together in an intimate business relationship. . . . Richard Ellerman did not have to explain his policy to Miss Margolin; she understood it without speech. She could follow his changes of front from a word or two dropped casually—even from the tone of a phrase. Everybody else with whom he dealt—even Joseph Stanfield, the president of the company—had to be provided with full instructions, diagrams and charts, before they understood him or would accept responsibility. At times this was embarrassing. . . . Not so with Miss Margolin. . . . Sometimes he did not want to say what he wanted. But Miss Margolin knew.

He considered her invaluable.

Miss Margolin's personal failings were too insignificant to mention. She was so deeply occupied by the vast Ellerman affairs that she had no time—or inclination—for even such a petty vice as gossip. Yet, it must be said that, when in company with her only intimate friend (a Miss Maida Morgan, who was a professor of chemistry in a woman's college), she did permit herself, on rare occasions, to relax

into a tiny mood of cattishness. On such occasions she referred to Blanche Rayner Ellerman as "a student of the higher cosmetics." She also said that "there is nothing quite so pathetic as a former star of the stage." . . . These lapses were the only possible specks on an otherwise unblemished habit of discretion.

"We'd be foolish to get mixed up in the battery business," Ellerman said thoughtfully. "Trouble enough as it is . . . but, by golly, we'd make it hum if we were in it."

"Certainly," said B. M., "we could make a go of it. But why?"

"That's what I say. Anyway, we'll take a grand little piece of change out of this deal before we're through with it, or I'll eat my hat. Mr. Gregory,"—he paused a moment, and then went on in an assumed falsetto voice—"*consultant to the automotive industry.*"

They both laughed.

"Now, this is an illustration," he exploded vehemently. "Confound it, those fellows out in Chicago, Stanfield, Elliott, Downes, all of 'em—they've got their minds so set on making cars that they miss all the big deals. You and I can sit here and think more easy money out of this business in a week than all of 'em together do in a year. This battery proposition is just a sample."

"Well, *they're* not Richard Ellermans," Miss Margolin remarked.

"What d'you think of Hunter?" Ellerman asked casually.

"Oh, he's a head clerk," . . . B. M. pressed her lips together and shook her head—"all right in his place . . . maybe."

"But what the devil is his place? They made him a vice-

president to run that railway traffic department—really a clerical job—never should have been done. Now he says that the traffic department runs itself, and——”

“He’s another Matheson,” Miss Margolin interrupted. “Another Matheson; and we had to let Matheson go finally. You called him a wordy theorist.”

“Exactly. By George, you’ve hit it. *Another Matheson.* You remember that feather-head practically quit his department and spent his time on a visionary scheme for every Tom, Dick and Harry out at Ellerman to own his own home. If we hadn’t got rid of him we would have had another strike.”

“Lebolt says Hunter is not good executive timber.” Miss Margolin chimed in at this point.

“Yes, I know . . . speaking of executive timber, I’ve done something that may surprise you.”

“*What?*” She uttered this word in a startled tone, and suddenly looked up. Ellerman’s hunches and sudden resolutions were sometimes grotesquely impractical, and it took all of her superior adroitness to overcome his stubborn will and keep them from being carried into effect.

Seeing her look of dismay, Ellerman hesitated a second or two. “I hope we won’t have any argument over it. I’ve offered Michael Webb a position as a vice-president of the company. Do you approve of that?”

For a moment there was a gleam of light in her eyes, and a faint glow of color in her face. “Approve of it?” she said. “Why, it’s genius . . . just genius . . . Michael Webb, the de-bunking expert. Well! Next year can’t you see our advertisements: *The Ellerman Car has no bunk?* Oh, that’s fine. The greatest de-bunking specialist in the world as vice-

president of the Ellerman Company. But can we control him?"

"Oh, yes—that's easy. Give him a job writing publicity, or something, and if we don't like what he writes we won't use it. . . . The trouble about this idea is that he hasn't accepted—not yet."

"Do you think he will?"

"I do-on't know. It's hard to say. I didn't press him. We'll let him think it over about a month, and then I'll tackle him again."

3

"Oh, by the way," Miss Margolin said a moment later, "I had the Ellerman plant on the wire this morning, and I told Rogers to contribute to both parties in the local election out there—five thousand to the Republicans and the same amount to the Democrats."

"Not the company's checks!" exclaimed Ellerman, startled.

"No. Cochran's a Democrat, and he gives them his personal check; and Maxwell does the same for the Republicans. I told Rogers to reimburse them—drawing the money and giving them both cash." She picked up a copy of the *Ellerman Daily Courier* from a pile lying on a chair and began to open it. "I put it through the paymaster's office instead of the treasurer's in Chicago, so if the matter ever becomes public, Stanfield can say he knows nothing about it. You are not supposed to know anything about it, either. I did it without your knowledge."

"Oh, don't bother about me knowing it," Ellerman remarked. "I've got a good forgetter. . . . I must say you're

rather generous to those shoddy politicians. I wouldn't have given them that much."

"Oh, it's not much, considering what we may have to ask of them before long. We're steering straight into labor trouble out there. And when that comes we've got to be in a position to control things."

"Labor trouble?" Ellerman repeated querulously and irritably. The mere mention of the phrase annoyed him—an annoyance as intense as that caused by a mention of the negro problem to a Southern senator.

Miss Margolin nodded. "Yes. Labor trouble," she said briskly. "You seem surprised at it: I don't know why you should be; you've read the reports of the men we planted in the labor unions. We've seen it coming for some time."

"I'm not surprised . . . I'm sick and tired of the whole thing," he said slowly. "Sick and tired. We gave 'em two raises in wages during the war. Had to—wasn't labor enough to go around. . . . When the war was over we reduced 'em a little. Why not? The men were back from the army and were begging for jobs. Literally begging. Good men, too. Thousands of them. If we'd been mean about it we could have cut wages down to the bone. But we didn't. Oh, no! We took a little off their war wages. They're getting from twenty-five to fifty per cent more now than they got before the war. And by God, they want more. They won't get it. It's hoggish! Plain, unvarnished hoggishness."

Miss Margolin picked up a bunch of typewritten sheets and quietly looked them over. "Here's the last reports of our inside observers in the labor unions," she mused, while

searching for a particular page. "I agree with you. We'd better make a stand and fight it out with them right now. . . . Just a moment. I'm looking for——"

"Here it is," she continued, and then she read from the paper in her hand:—

"'At this point Fred Jackson of the electrical department rose——'

"This Jackson—I'm reading a confidential report of a union meeting—this Jackson is an agitator and a violent Socialist," Miss Margolin interpolated——

"'and said that although the average wage in the plant is about thirty per cent higher than it was in the pre-war period, the company is getting seventy-five per cent higher prices for its cars, and is making three times as much money as it did before the war. Jackson said that even with a ten per cent increase in all wages—and salaries—the company would still earn twice as much as it did a few years ago.'"

"There they go!" Ellerman uttered explosively. "What the devil has all that got to do with wages? Certainly the company is earning more than it did before the war, but we are not indebted to that bunch of cylinder-borers for it. They're doing the same work they've always done. We're building a better car, we're finding a bigger market for it, our sales force is stronger; and we're getting a higher price for our machine because the country is more prosperous than ever before and more people are buying cars. If left to the workers in the plant this business would have died of starvation long ago. We're paying the market price for labor, aren't we?"

"Oh, yes," Miss Margolin answered. "We certainly are.

We buy labor like everything else—at the market price. It's these Socialists. They're getting in the unions everywhere and making the men discontented."

"That's right. That's it," her employer agreed. "We could always handle the labor unions somehow or other—that is, as they used to be—either by meeting them halfway, or by buying off their leaders. The labor union is simply out for more pay, and nothing else—and that's all there is to it—and we know how to talk to them. But these Socialists . . . they don't speak our language. When you come right down to it, what do they want?"

"There isn't much doubt about their ideas," said B. M. "You're right; they don't speak our language. In the first place, they contend that there's no place in the world for the capitalist, the banker or the financier. All these—so they claim—are mere parasites on productive labor.

"All the basic industries—they say—should be carried on for the benefit of the nation. They think it absurd that a coal mine should be private property—and, of course, all land—real estate—ought to belong to the people——"

"They don't respect private property," Ellerman exclaimed, red in the face with anger. "It's revolutionary. It's plain anarchy. And we sit still, in this country, and let this damned thing grow up around us. It's un-American——"

"Of course it is," Miss Margolin calmly agreed, "but there's no use losing your temper over it. Here it is, and we've got to deal with it. . . . I've tried to analyze their argument, and I believe its central point to be that the whole production, the making of a living, ought to be considered simply as an incidental thing in daily life instead of taking

up one's whole time. It's one of those silly ideals that get hold of weak-minded people."

In strict truth, it should be set forth here that Richard Ellerman did not *disagree* with these views. Disagreement is not precisely the word. His mind was simply opaque to them; he did not consider them at all. One does not weigh the argument of a fool, and he held such opinions to be the outpourings of a defective mind. He looked upon the American scene as an arena of contest for cash prizes. He thought of human labor merely as a commodity; in fact, he considered everything—including good-will, virtue, and religion—as commodities which might be manipulated, and bought and sold.

"An incidental thing, eh?" Ellerman said. "The business of the world just a little trifling matter, to be finished in a few hours. What do they think they'd do the rest of the time? Loaf?"

B. M. smiled with a trace of contempt on her cold, bright face. "Well, that's what it would be—so I think. They would spend their time in plain idleness. But that isn't what they say"—she laughed mechanically—"they say that with the whole of the work of the production taken out of competition, all the waste motions eliminated, and everybody put to doing something really useful, the necessary work could be done in three or four hours a day; and the rest of the time would be spent in making life more beautiful, in athletic sports, in study, in creating works of art. They talk a good deal about taking fear out of humanity——"

"Fear of what?" Ellerman demanded.

"Fear of poverty. They argue that it's disgraceful for the civilized world to have any poverty in it, taking into

account the—the large productive capacity of modern machinery.”

“Let me tell you something,” Ellerman said emphatically. “I know a little about the human race. People have got to be made to work. You take the fear of poverty away and you’ll never get anywhere. There would be no ambition. We’ll never get together with these Socialists. We’ve got to think up some way to clean them out of the plant.”

“We have a perfect nest of them out there,” said B. M. “I don’t know how it happened. That Socialist newspaper at Ellerman has two thousand circulation, and is running a pretty close race with this rag”—she tapped the pile of *Ellerman Couriers*—“which we’re supporting with our money. And now they have a full list of candidates in the field. . . . They’ll be beaten, but if these ridiculous ideas keep on spreading there’ll come a day when we’ll wake up to find the city administration of Ellerman in the hands of a lot of Bolshevik cranks.”

“Such people oughtn’t to be allowed to vote,” exclaimed Ellerman. “People who are opposed to the constitution of the United States shouldn’t be allowed to vote or hold office.”

“I’m entirely convinced that the whole thing is being handled wrong,” said B. M. “This movement ought to be smothered to death right now, before it gets any bigger. Just consider the situation here in New York State. . . . Four or five socialists were in the Legislature, and Speaker Sweet had them thrown out. It was a bold, courageous thing to do. He simply took the law in his own hands, and got the Legislature to expel them. He wasn’t sustained at all by the public; most of the Socialists were reelected and

came back. They claimed their expulsion was unconstitutional——”

“What if it was unconstitutional?” Ellerman’s fist struck the desk with a bang. “There are times when you’ve got to disregard the constitution—got to disregard everything. Lincoln disregarded it. The freeing of the slaves was an unconstitutional act.”

Miss Margolin turned half around, faced her desk, and took another sip of milk. “Well, we’ve got to fight them sometime, and the sooner the better.”

“If we can’t keep labor in line in this country, we might as well quit,” Ellerman said vigorously. “God knows we want to be fair—I speak for other employers of labor as well as for myself—but if they don’t appreciate the fact that we’re paying them good wages and furnishing them with the opportunity to earn a decent living, then——”

“That’s just it,” she interrupted. “They don’t appreciate it. They say they’re doing it all, and that we live only by sufferance . . . an ungrateful lot. . . . Sh-h!” she held up her hand—“Let’s not get excited over it. We’ll beat them when the time comes. Remember we’ve got the plant—we’ve got the machinery. And we’ve got more brains; we can think faster than they can. If it ever comes to a life and death fight we can always close the plant and starve them to terms.”

Ellerman rose suddenly and began walking aimlessly around the room. As he went he tore strips of paper from the letter in his hand, with unconscious mechanical movements, and rolling these strips into balls he threw them viciously into the wastebasket as he passed it. This was one of his habitual gestures when annoyed.

"Well, here's something not so exciting," said B. M. "A letter from that pop-eyed editor in Ellerman. He sends along a lot of marked editorials, and writes you another letter asking for my job."

"Does he say so in plain words?" her employer asked.

"No. He hints. Says he believes himself to be fitted for a larger sphere of usefulness, that his loyalty to you is the greatest thing in life to him; and that, considering his knowledge of local conditions in Ellerman, he feels he could be of distinct service in a confidential capacity close to you personally."

Ellerman gazed for a moment into vacancy. "You know, I've got an idea. We might send that chap to Congress. He's a thorough-going lickspittle, and we could control every word he says."

"Has no ability," B. M. said with a cynical smile. "In the line of ability he's a total loss. Expend all his energy in being a lickspittle. With our money and moral support behind him, he has let that Socialist paper catch up with him in circulation and influence. They started with a few hundred dollars in cash, and a broken-down press. He's virtually beaten by them." With a quiet old-maidish gesture she took another sip of milk. "We'd be better off," she resumed, "if the wretched fool were on the other side, and opposed to us."

"Let me see those editorials," Ellerman said, sitting down in a huge office chair and placing his gold-rimmed glasses carefully on his nose.

She brought the pile of papers over and laid them before him. "If it's like that," he remarked, "we had better think of getting rid of him, and putting somebody else on the

paper." . . . As he picked up one of the newspapers a sudden heat seemed to invade him. "It's one goddam thing after another," he said irascibly.

B. M. went back to her desk and picked up the receiver of one of the four telephones that stood on it in a gaunt row. "Hello. The garage. Miss Margolin speaking. Have a car and a chauffeur around here in ten minutes. I'll be gone about two hours."

Ellerman looked up over the top of his glasses. "Going somewhere?" he asked. "Where are you going?"

"Play golf," she replied. "I'm one of Mr. Lowrey's patients, too. He says I'm to play golf three times a week. . . . If anything comes up while I'm gone, Mr. Tappan or Miss Thompson can take care of it."

"It'll do you good. It'll take some of the temper out of you."

"Me?" she remarked. "Me? Temper? It seems to have been a failure in your case."

4

Richard Ellerman's career illustrates clearly the fixity of purpose which is the first law of great financial success.

It is a career for the single-track mind, blind to wide horizons, and bent solely on material acquisition. That is why the life-stories of the kings of commerce are so dreary. Their lives are, in fact, bare and dull.

They have ideals—human existence is not possible without them—but their ideals are usually naïve, incredibly childish and gilded with a meretricious gaudiness. Through the control of power they are able to impose these mediocre

ideals upon civilization and thus set a standard of achievement which is unworthy of the human spirit.

To observe the mind of big business clearly we must first make ourselves immune to its glitter, to the artificial glamour that surrounds it. Then we see that its dominating motives are self-interest and self-assertion. It confuses ability with trickiness, and is unsympathetic to the type of mind which does not know how to "sell itself." It is saturated with the social poison of salesmanship—so it brings the glad-hand variety of intellect to the front, and quite genuinely and naïvely takes it for real ability. Through lack of intelligent direction it manufactures muddle and inefficiency in immense volume and over a wide field of action. There is less difficulty in gaining its own ends in a state of muddle than there would be in a state of order, for muddle confuses all issues, distorts all values, and diverts attention. Productive processes which could be carried on with facility are thus made enormously difficult.

These traits are allied to the stern intentness of purpose which gives this mind its chief distinction. Color and charm are born of the clash of contending inner impulses. Richness of character, sympathy and understanding of life are developed by natures trying to set themselves in balance. This inner strife is lacking in the great mind of business or finance. It is driven by a single fixed purpose. Consequently, it has only a limited understanding, and acquires information without knowledge.

But—still worse—it lacks foresight. This failing appears to be congenital and ineradicable, for even in its own field of industrial enterprise it cannot see into the future, and merely stumbles through life, seizing and holding

rapaciously anything it comes across which seems to have material value.

It runs headlong into a world war like a blind man walking into a ditch and carries with it a flock of deluded nations. It is surprised at everything and irritated at everything. Being devoid of constructive social genius, it is unable to devise any workable plan for the betterment of the world, so it contents itself with a complacent, piddling philanthropy. Like a surly dog with a bone, it snarls at those who approach it with suggestions for creating a world of beauty and kindness.

Such a mind can be moved only by catastrophes. These it understands and respects. This is a pity, since it necessarily follows that it must be spoken to, if at all, in terms of disaster. The world is now delivering an address in this language, and the oratory promises to become much more eloquent within the next few years.

5

Richard Ellerman was of this type. He was not a technician; he was a financier. His ability lay in handling the ingenious financial deals which marked his company's progress, in stifling competition by indirect methods, and in manipulating the company's shares on the Stock Exchange.

The actual business of producing Ellerman cars had grown up virtually as a separate organism, managed by expert engineers.

He experienced a sensual feeling of power in realizing that this highly organized productive machinery must obey his will. He could stop it all instantly, and as easily as

switching off a light. He might stop it even without giving a reason—if he cared to—and the sixteen thousand men whose lives were bound up in it could do no more than wander dumbly through the silent town like cattle in a field when the drinking stream runs dry.

Chapter Twenty-one

The Mental Radio

I

THE huge stone house at Shadow Lawn stood spaciouly aloof from the grilled iron entrance gates, but it was so carefully placed, in respect to slope and vista, that the eyes of those who passed were filled with it as with a great white flame. From its sides the lawns, as flawless as a newly-woven fabric, flowed out with a gesture of lordly distance. Here and there they were speckled with trees, opaque of shadow and carefully tended. These gave the estate its name.

This beauty was definitely arranged. It had been ordered from architects and landscape gardeners as one orders a cheese from a grocer. Though without spontaneity, it had been cleverly conceived, and was meticulous in its perfection. But it was also more than that . . . it was aggressive. Without aggressiveness it would not have pleased Richard Ellerman, and without a touch of billposting showiness it would not have pleased his wife. As it stood among the modest tree-bordered lanes and bashful Westchester hills it made one think of a prizefighter in a dress suit. The newspapers called it "a show place," and it was.

It was not a home, but a symbol of power—the house,

its grounds, its tapestries, its paintings, its marbles, its books, its bronzes. Not spiritual power, not intellectual power, but material power. Its owner did not understand any other kind of power. There a discerning eye sees the fatal chink in his armor, the breach in the strong fortresses of all his breed. Through that breach there shall march an army with banners.

To those attuned to its inspiration, this symbol, and the idea surrounding it, were sharply stimulating. It sent out its thrills in wave-lengths keyed so low that they were received by millions of people who could not intercept a finer, higher inspiration.

For a moment we shall turn on the mental radio and entertain ourselves with its echoes, as they come through the air, blurred and in fragments:—

Here's the first thing we catch from the air.

"Whose place is that, Henry?" . . . Intent on the road and the steering wheel, Henry felt a tap on his shoulder. "That big white palace on the right. . . . Look! Oh, look; see those guards at the gate. My goodness! What a fine place! It has the initials R. E. on the iron grillwork. Yes. R. E. That's right."

"Oh, *that!*" Henry heard and slowed down. "That's Ellerman's place . . . the man who made this car. Great, isn't it?"

"Well, I'll tell the world that Ellerman ought to be an optimist. God! He must be rich."

"Yeh-yeh. He is. Made it all himself, too. In the beginning he was a poorer man than any of us here. . . . Started out in a little machine shop in Chicago and made

automobiles. Put every cent he had in it. . . . People laughed at him, but he stuck to it. Now look at him."

"Well, that simply shows what a man can do if he has brains and works hard. It kinder encourages a fellow to see a success like that."

"It certainly does."

Pause here—We'll connect with another station.

Lilyan stretched herself languorously on the scented and be-pillowed couch, arranged her pink negligee, thrust forth a foot in a gilded slipper, lighted a cigarette and unfolded the Sunday newspaper. "Listen, Dollie," she called out across the room, "here's a picture of Richard Ellerman and his old false-face of a wife horseback riding at White Sulphur Springs. Gee, she looks as old as King Tut."

"Oh, she ain't so old," said Dolly, diligently polishing her nails. "I guess she's worried. Margaret Pratt's got her husband daffy, and I suppose she knows it."

"Is that still going on? The Austrian Count, too? I heard that she and that Count fixed it all up so she would appear to be a music teacher, and that's how they hooked him."

"Sure, she's still going strong. The Count is very much on the job, dearie. The funniest thing happened. Pratt's maid told my Judith. It seems that the Count was there, quite at home, you know. You see, they thought dear Dickie was out of town. Then, lo and behold, somebody from downstairs telephoned that Ellerman was on his way up. Oh, Gawd! Grand slam! The Count just had time to pop into a closet about a foot deep, and he had to stay there six mortal hours. *Poor thing!* When Ellerman finally left

they got him out, and her maid said they had to apply first aid. He was all in."

Titters from both sides of the room.

Another pause here.

In the middle of the afternoon, when the dark, oak-panelled lounge of the club was almost empty, Devore came in and made his way to one of the chairs before the ruddy, cheerful fire. He looked a second at a man half-dozing with a magazine in his hands. "Hello, Hewlett," he said, "is your book finished yet?"

"I—ah—beg pardon. Oh, hello, Devore; I didn't see you come in. Yes. It's finished. Just finished."

"I understand it's pretty good stuff."

"Oh, I dunno. Medium good, I expect." Hewlett adjusted his gold-rimmed glasses with the black ribbon and gazed owlishly at the fire. "It's a book of inspiration. The title is fine, I think. I call it *Onward and Upward*. In a way it's something like *The Americanization of Edward Bok*, I show how any sober, honest, bright young man can make a place for himself."

"Yes? Well, that ought to be good. Ought to be a good seller, too."

"I hope so. . . . I wonder if Richard Ellerman would allow me to dedicate it to him?"

"Why not? He's the type of man your book describes. Why not ask him?"

"I think I shall. . . . I suppose I'd better write him. You wouldn't call him on the 'phone, would you?"

"No; not on the 'phone. My plan would be—if I were you—to write him a note on club stationery—nice, you know

—club paper, and just ask him. If it is dedicated to him, he might buy a thousand copies or so, and send 'em around to his friends.”

Now we shall hear what they're saying in the dubious stock-and-bond region of Times Square.

“Sometimes, Jack—I hate to say it, old top—but sometimes I think you're just a complete damn fool.”

“No, you don't. You're saying that to make your objection sound stronger. You know you have a way of considering anybody with initiative a damn fool.”

“It ain't that, Jack. . . . Initiative's all right, but this idea is too dangerous. Here we are, selling stock to the public to beat the band. Not only that—we're law-proof. Everything is ship-shape. All right. Now, you ain't satisfied. You want to issue this big batch of preferred stock, sell it, and put the money in our pockets. It's too risky.”

“Oh, rats! You're all wrong. . . . That ain't what I proposed. What I propose, and what we're going to do, is to sell this stock, and then the company will use the money to buy our land from us. What's the matter with that? The record will be as clean as a hound's tooth, and I defy anybody to say different. To hear you talk, a person would think that I intended to *steal* the money.”

“Yeh, that's O.K., if you can do it. But that land's not worth more'n ten cents an acre. Suppose it gets into court?”

“That'll make no difference. What I'm going to do is something Richard Ellerman did when he controlled the Everglades Improvement Company, and I guess he's a big enough guy to follow. You agree with me there, don't you? Well, he sold the company a hundred thousand acres of

swamp for five hundred thousand dollars. That land didn't cost him over forty cents an acre, and he got five dollars for it. How's that, Mr. Umpire?"

"But he had a gang of sharp lawyers helping fix it up."

"Yes, he did. And we have, too. We have a couple of the cleverest lawyers on Manhattan Island. That's no pipe dream, either. You leave it to me."

This is from the ring of smoky steel-and-iron towns around Pittsburgh.

Mother's hand, rough and red from its daily drowning in hot, soapy water, patted lovingly the boy's cheek, and the back of his head rested against her bosom as she bent over him. The shaded lamp laid a segment of yellow light on his open books and the arithmetic examples worked out in large, coarse figures with a stubby pencil. The boy caught, faintly, the odor of soapsuds and cooking.

"I've been saving this magazine paper for you, son," Mother said, her tone a verbal caress. "There's something in it I want you to read"—and she laid an illustrated magazine open before him—"It's all about Richard Ellerman, the great millionaire, and how he got his start . . . a poor boy he was, and a widow's son, too. He *worked his way* through college"—there was a note of triumph in her voice—"he studied hard, and worked hard, and now he's one of the biggest men in the country."

The boy took the magazine. "Oh, gee, mother, it's got pictures," he exclaimed irrelevantly.

"Yes. Pictures. You see, there's Mr. Ellerman—and there's a picture of his wife. . . . Hasn't she got a sweet, kind face! And that's his house . . . look what a grand

place it is . . . and this big building is at the college. When Mr. Ellerman got to be a rich man he made the college a gift of it."

Now, just listen, boys and girls! This next one is from Central Park West.

"But, Verbena," said Mrs. Pratt in a dismayed voice. "I *told* you never, *never* to *put* the letters on the *table* while Mr. Ellsworth is here. Now *see* what you've done." Her words ran in a rhythm of emphasis. She sat in her silk knickers before a dressing table with a three-panel adjustable mirror. In her right hand she held a coal-black, greasy crayon which she had been rubbing over her eyebrows. . . . The girl stood in the center of the room and stared at her stupidly.

Presently the African intellect produced a conglomeration of negatives. "No'm, Mis' Pratt, I never put no letters on no table."

"I told you repeatedly that when Mr. Ellsworth is here you *are not* to bring in the mail, but to keep it in the kitchen until he leaves."

"Yas'm. Dat's right. But Mr. Ellsworth, he tuk 'em outer my hand. He 'spected 'em all; den he tuk one letter, an' give me de rest back."

"What did the letter look like, Verbena?" Mrs. Pratt asked in agitated tones. "Was it in a woman's handwriting, or a man's?"

"I dunno what han'writing it wuz in, m'am."

"Was it a nice, pretty, square envelope, or was it——"

"No'm . . . it wuzn't no fancy en-*vel*-ope. It had Hotel sumf'n or other, Atlantic City, on it."

Mrs. Pratt laid down her eyebrow crayon and gave a deep, melancholy sigh. "Oh, dear, dear, dear, dear, . . ."

You needn't laugh. You would say a lot of "dears," too, if your business was being ruined by the *gaucheries* of a darkey servant.

Chapter Twenty-two

The Money-spinner

I

NOW we turn off the mental radio and take a glimpse into the mind of Mr. Edward Gregory, consultant to the automotive industry, who is entering the iron gates of Shadow Lawn in the car from the Ellerman garage that was sent to meet him at the station. He has been acquainted remotely with Richard Ellerman for a number of years, but this is his first visit to Shadow Lawn. On his knees is a bulky package. It is Hunter's plan, which he is bringing back.

Mr. Gregory is bitten by indecision. He has not, even at this last hour, made up his mind whether he shall advise Ellerman to manufacture his own batteries. It would be fine—he thought—if he could secure the Ellerman Motor Car Company as a regular client, with an annual retaining fee, like his other clients. In that case he would not hesitate a moment. By all means the company should make its own batteries. This was the first time the Ellerman Company had ever asked anything of him, and if it were to be the last—if this were only a sporadic, isolated incident, leading to nothing further—then, other considerations had to be kept in mind. The axe he had to grind was carefully con-

cealed—so he thought. . . . He would give a few hints, before stating his opinion, about a permanent connection . . . and see what developed.

Close at hand, the immense white palace evoked oppressive ideas. Its splendor had the quality of weight; it lay upon Mr. Gregory like a heavy white hand. . . . He thought of his own modest villa at Montclair. Modest—yet at that he was better off than most of his neighbors, who were of the commuting tribe of insurance men, steamship brokers, bank officials, and so on. . . . His house had fifteen rooms, and wide piazzas with hammocks on them. An English living room, with a curio-cabinet containing little ivory elephants and an enameled cigarette box. . . . And there was a garage, and a chauffeur, and his two daughters played tennis in the correct Southampton style with the open-collared young men of the neighborhood on the hard court squeezed in between the house and the palings. His girls had little bank accounts of their own, and swaggered a bit, and every autumn they went to football games, and waved flags for Princeton.

They had all been to Europe, too, on the *Aquitania*—“That’s the most comfortable ship, you know,” his wife always said when referring to it. Two little staterooms way down on D Deck . . . and now there was Richard Ellerman’s long and graceful ocean-going yacht, *White Lady*, lying out in the Hudson; he had seen it while coming up in the train. . . . Yes, they had been to Europe, to most of the important places. Even to Aix-les-Bains, where they stayed for a week at the Hotel Mirabeau in hot, airless rooms jammed up under the sloping roof. . . .

The stiff, formal footman led Mr. Gregory down a wide

hall past great rooms where historic canvases glowed on the walls. He thought of the painting in his own dining room, over the mantel, in which they all had so much pride. It was a real oil painting of Grandfather Pickering, of "good old New England stock." For the first time in his life he despised Grandfather Pickering as an art collection.

How in the name of Heaven has all this come about—thought Mr. Gregory. For twenty-five years he had studied automobiles, and his annual forecast of the industry for the coming year was (and is) looked upon with great respect. He had been a recognized expert when the whole thing was an insignificant business, and before the first Ellerman Car had been made. In the early days he studied the industry with a frantic enthusiasm, neglecting everything else, so it might be truthfully asserted that nobody else knew as much about motor cars as he did. . . . He had written three books on automobiles—their mechanism—the organization of the industry—and efficient selling methods. But, in spite of all this, he could not earn over thirty thousand dollars a year—sometimes less—and that could be done only by the most intense application.

His emotion was that of depressed envy; a vague sense of defeat. Yet that was absurd . . . he knew it was absurd, because he was considered a bright success and his family and friends thought he had done amazingly well . . . still . . . small comfort. . . . Of one thing he was certain—he had never demanded enough for his services. So he made up his mind to charge Richard Ellerman exactly one thousand dollars for this consultation. "I'll soak him good and hard" almost came out of his lips in words. And if he succeeded in getting the Ellerman Company as a regular

client, on a retaining fee, he decided that the fee should be not less than five thousand dollars a year.

2

"I meant what I said to you the other day on the golf course." Richard Ellerman stopped and put his hand on Michael Webb's shoulder—an habitual gesture. Michael was standing on the terrace when Ellerman came by. He had passed in his brisk, staccato manner, with a "good-morning" and a finger lifted in greeting. Then he turned suddenly and came back. "I meant what I said. I hope you'll consider it carefully?"

"Which?" Michael asked. "That I wasn't worth a damn, or that you wanted me to work for you? You said both. Which did you mean—or did you mean both?" He laughed gaily, and his laugh was so infectious that Ellerman's face broke into a smile.

"Oh, you understand me, you joker," Ellerman chuckled. "Very few people understand me, but you do. So does Miss Margolin." He paused an instant and continued gravely: "My motives are often misinterpreted."

"Mine aren't," Michael replied. "Everybody understands me. I leave nothing to the imagination. That's why I'm such a big success. Have you any idea how much I'm worth . . . in hard, cold dollars?"

"No, I haven't," said Ellerman, still smiling, "and that's neither here nor there. If I were you I'd quit sloshing around with this philosophy, and second-rate stuff. . . . You ought to apply yourself to something in earnest. I see a good deal in you; I've always been considered a competent judge

of men. And my offer of a vice-presidency in my company is not to be sneezed at. . . . It's a fine opportunity. Some men spend half their lives working up to a position like that—good, able men, too."

Michael shook his head, and came back quickly, "It won't suit me, then. I don't work up. I always work down. It's lots easier."

Ellerman felt annoyed, but his persistence was of the Triple A brand, and was capable of overlooking any amount of annoyance when there was an end in view. "Let me tell you one thing, old man," he began, "and I'm telling you this for your own good. You're getting the reputation of being a Smart Aleck. That's the truth. I've heard several people say so. People are beginning to consider you a Smart Aleck, and you don't deserve it. *It's your manner.*" Ellerman looked very serious as he made this speech. Serious and sympathetic.

"I don't *deserve* it!" Michael exclaimed. "Well, I must say you've got a nerve to tell me that to my face. I don't deserve it, eh? Well, I'll bet I'm the smartest Aleck that you've seen in ten years."

The impulse to turn on his heel and walk away from this light-headed joker almost carried Ellerman off, but he felt this would be a defeat. He wanted to be Michael Webb's superior, and he could think of no better way than to get him on the company's pay-roll. The only relations between people that seemed to him to have any reality were those of master and servant, buyer and seller, under dog and upper dog. He did not care much for cringing people; there were too many around. He liked independent, outspoken men—liked them to be independent, and then liked to own them,

so that in the relation of master to servant, he could show them that they were not as independent as they thought they were. His nature was as simple as a jack-knife. It was nothing but an essential meanness of a soul obsessed with a hunger for domination.

He put his hand on Michael's shoulder again, and smiled. "You know, you'd do well in vaudeville. . . . However, this is not my morning for jokes, so I've got to hurry along. And say, I want you to think seriously about my offer; you'll come around to it in time, and it'll be a good thing for you. . . . I've got a conference on at eleven. . . . Oh, by the way, wouldn't you like to come in and listen? It's about Hunter's battery idea. Come on and get into the business atmosphere."

Michael said he would like very much to listen to the conference.

"That's right—that's the boy," Ellerman said as they walked along the terrace to his office. "I'll make a big business man of you yet." A paternal pat on the back accompanied this remark.

"This fellow we're going to meet to-day," he confided, "is Edward Gregory, a very well-known man in the automobile world—and highly thought of. He's a consultant——"

"What's that?" Michael inquired. "A consulting engineer?"

"It's more than a consulting engineer. He's up on sales methods, organization, cost and profits, personnel—everything. I suppose you think it rather strange that I should get an outside authority to pass on this proposition when we have experts of our own. . . . Well, it's not so strange, after all. I want to get some opinion of the thing strictly

on its merits, without any personal bias. All our people know Hunter, of course, and—and—well, I want to know what Edward Gregory thinks of it. . . . That doesn't mean, necessarily, that I'll take his advice. It's up to me to make decisions, unfortunately, and it's as likely as not that I may decide the other way."

"But you've already made up your mind," said Michael. "You've already decided. Do you just want to hear this man talk?"

"You said that the other day," Ellerman clipped away in his staccato manner, with a trace of the snarl that came into his voice on occasion. "I don't understand you—unless your comment comes from a total unfamiliarity with business methods. Certainly, I haven't decided yet." . . . The angry expression on his face quickly melted into a smile. "Oh, that's all right. You don't understand business."

It was not yet eleven o'clock, and Edward Gregory sat awaiting that hour in the conference room. With a thoughtful expression and a wrinkled brow he kept turning over the sheets of Hunter's plan. There was no reason for doing this, except that he fancied it would look better to appear so engaged when Ellerman came in.

"Mr. Gregory, I'm going to leave this gentleman with you for ten minutes or so," the motor car magnate said, after a few desultory remarks. "Mr. Hunter will probably be here soon, and Miss Margolin and I will be in here at eleven *promptly*." He emphasized the "promptly" and turned toward Michael and nodded slightly, as if to say with a gesture, "You see how punctual we are in business."

Edward Gregory had not caught Michael's name; it had sounded to him like "Micheler." He was a cautious man, and in his mind he clicked off the names of all the executive officers of the Ellerman Company. Micheler. Nobody of that name among the company's officials. Well, "Micheler" was an expensively clothed, jovial, confident-looking person. Probably just a wealthy friend of Ellerman's; possibly an associate, some millionaire interested in the company.

Even if he had heard Michael's name correctly it would have meant nothing to him. The Second-Rate Clubs, and the controversy about them, and Michael's literary productions—these had gone past his eyes, and he had not seen them. Nor heard of them. He possessed the capacity of being able to read a newspaper without seeing in it anything he did not want to see, or for which he was not looking. His mind was a closed house, with one tiny door left open through which any new idea concerning automobiles could enter. This is a device of the labor-saving intellect.

His favorite author, for a long time, was E. Phillips Oppenheim, but since he had read *If Winter Comes* he thought Hutchinson had a little the better of Oppenheim as a leader of English literature. . . . In the field of serious books there was no doubt whatever in his opinion that Herbert Hoover's *American Individualism* was the most powerful, vital work produced in America since the days of Emerson. He had the little volume in his pocket, as he had been reading it on the train, and after a few straggling remarks about the weather and the train service, he

brought the conversation around to it. It was to his advantage, he thought, to appear familiar with the emanations of the great American minds.

"It's a timely book written by a big he-man," Mr. Gregory commented, and passed it over for Michael's inspection.

"I know. I've already seen it," Michael said, as he handed it back.

"American ideals," Mr. Gregory continued. "That's what Mr. Hoover stands for—and he stands pat."

"And what does he mean precisely by American ideals?" Michael queried in his gentle-speaking manner. "Does he mean the ideals of—let us say—a railroad conductor, or those of Mr. Edward Bok? Or does he mean the idealism of Nicholas Murray Butler and General Pershing? Or the idealism of a Dakota wheat farmer? Or that of a New York City truck-driver living in a four-room flat with a family of five?"

"Oh, it's the idealism of the average—a composite, I'm sure," Mr. Gregory interjected.

Michael shook his head gravely. "I doubt that. I really do. In this composite idealism I doubt if he has included the ideals of Mr. Eugene Debs, one of our foremost Americans. Mr. Debs has recently spent several years in a penitentiary for talking about ideals in public. Under such distressing circumstances I hardly think Mr. Hoover would give much weight to Mr. Debs' views."

"Oh, I don't think he does," Mr. Gregory said wholeheartedly. He pondered a moment. "The book will give you a better idea of what he means than I can tell you. He simply sweeps away every argument of the visionary rad-

ical—the people who, while pretending to be honest, loyal Americans, are trying night and day to undermine our democratic institutions. American individualism. That's Mr. Hoover's strong point.

"By individualism he means—so I take it—the initiative, the constructiveness, you know, the democratic equality of opportunity that have built up this prosperous, free land of ours. The get-together idea, you know, all pulling together."

"But his theme is individualism," Michael insisted. "There's no get-together about individualism. It means another thing—quite."

"Oh, I mean getting together in the true sense of the word," Mr. Gregory explained. "You know—everybody for himself, but all moving in the same direction."

The truth is that Mr. Gregory really did not know what Mr. Hoover meant. He was still in that primitive area of social consciousness where one is hypnotized by a phrase, and Mr. Hoover's phrases sounded fine. . . . He loved Mr. Hoover's dim, rolling sentences stuffed with woolly words, such as "motivation," "legalistic," and "mutuality of interest." He did not know that the world is facing new facts and new measures of value, and is looking for enlightenment instead of platitudes.

"Yes, I suppose that is his thought," Michael said. "I looked over that book, and I gathered the impression that its author, Mr. Hoover, intended it as a sort of monkey gland treatment for senility of the capitalist regime."

Mr. Gregory did not grasp fully the meaning of this observation. The language in which it was expressed was unusual, and he was accustomed only to standardized Eng-

lish. He conceived it to be a humorous remark, slightly derogatory, and he came to the book's defence.

"In its importance, my dear sir"—Mr. Gregory's voice sank impressively—"that book of Hoover's is equal to the winning of a great battle."

"Is that so? Well, even at that, he hasn't got anything on the *Boston Transcript*. He may have won a battle, but the *Transcript* won a war. They won it with a word. *Psittacism*."

Mr. Gregory held up a correcting hand. "No," he uttered dolefully. "I'm sorry to say that report was premature. It turned out to be only a rumor."

"That's too bad. We had quite a pleasant time here the other evening kicking the corpse around."

"Oh, well—don't worry," Mr. Gregory consoled. "It will come, and pretty soon. Bolshevism is on its last legs. Can't last. It's nothing but an unspeakable economic heresy, engineered by a few sharpers to take in the gullible and illiterate. Rotten to the core——"

"Hydra-headed, too," Michael added.

"That's right. A hydra-headed evil." Mr. Gregory was not really alarmed over Bolshevism. He knew nothing about it, and cared nothing about it, but he expressed these sentiments vehemently because he thought Michael would be pleased to hear him assert his soundness. "It is only a symptom of the general unrest prevailing throughout the world," he added. "The European countries are changing all the time, seizing territory, grabbing all they can. Thank God we're American."

Changing, are they? All right—Michael thought—I'll try him out a little on the European business.

"Do you think Belgium will absorb Egypt?" he asked Gregory, innocently and casually.

Mr. Gregory was inwardly aghast at this question. He must have missed something in the news. It wouldn't do to say he knew nothing about it; that would mean he was not well-informed. Let me see. Belgium. Egypt. He had never heard of anything . . . however. "That's a pretty hard question to be positive about," he asserted, playing for time, while the tentacles of his mind felt around hazily over the map of Europe and Africa. Egypt is a British possession, isn't it? Yes, I'm sure it is. The Congo. Didn't Belgium have something to do with the Congo?

"We-ell, the tendency over there just now is to shift around a good deal," he said, "and almost anything may happen. I'd hardly think that Belgium would take over Egypt, and still I wouldn't be surprised if she did."

"It's sort of six of one and half a dozen of the other, you think?"

"Yes, you can put it that way, and be about right in all those foreign entanglements," said Mr. Gregory.

"But England may invoke the old Statutes of St. Mark, before permitting it," Michael argued, "and simply appeal to the Mediterranean League, and let the whole thing rest on her rights under the ancient Roman law."

Mr. Gregory became silent and thoughtful. I wonder what he's thinking about now—ran in Michael's mind. Maybe he thinks I've escaped from somewhere, and is preparing to call the police.

But no. Nothing so positive was in Mr. Gregory's thoughts. "I'm really not up-to-date on this *particular* situation," he said, "but as a general principle you can be

sure those old statutes and treaties are ineffective. The war proved that."

"You're right," Michael assented. "The war proved that. Still, there's got to be something done—a *modus vivendi*, at any rate."

"*Exactly*," Mr. Gregory said with emphasis, the two minds meeting at this point. "In the last analysis it all comes down—not only this problem, but all others like it—it all comes right down to a modern outlook on life. That's all there is to it. Keep a modern outlook on life, and these complicated world problems become simple."

Now I've got him—thought Michael gleefully. I've got him hog-tied. I'm going to ask him what he means by a modern outlook on life.

He did not have time to ask this profound question. Miss Margolin came in and lowered the temperature with her cold formality. In a moment she was followed by Ellerman and Hunter.

4

Mr. Gregory had prepared a little speech in which he intended to say that he was glad—indeed, he was proud—to be of service to Mr. Ellerman and the Ellerman Motor Car Company, and that he hoped this beginning would lead to—to—well, to numerous repetitions of the same—no, that wouldn't do. That it would lead to a business relationship of mutual advantage. And also—he intended to call attention to the fact that he was peculiarly situated to give his services to Mr. Ellerman, being located in New York, within an hour's ride of Dobbs Ferry. . . . If this little feeler

seemed to arouse a favorable response he was going to advise Mr. Ellerman to manufacture his own batteries. Why shouldn't he? . . . Mr. Gregory had often wondered why automobile manufacturers generally did not produce their own storage batteries. Quite a simple thing to do . . . but then, there was the matter of price. They could buy them below the cost of production. Still—that objection wouldn't hold in this particular case, for Hunter's plan included the selling of batteries to the public through the Ellerman motor car dealers, and that ought to be very profitable.

But—Mr. Gregory thought—if he failed to get a favorable rise from his preliminary speech, then he intended to advise strongly against going into this hazardous, complicated side issue of battery-making. He was not going to imperil the business of his battery clients—and encourage a competitor—just for a transient thousand-dollar fee. So he sat mentally on the fence.

Miss Margolin took charge of the conference, briskly; almost harshly. Mr. Gregory's little preparatory talk remain unsaid. . . . Richard Ellerman slumped down in his chair, held his eyeglasses dangling from a hand that seemed transfixed, and gazed with a vacant, meaningless stare at a small map on the wall. It was perfectly plain to Mr. Gregory that Ellerman was hearing nothing of the conference, and that he was bored almost to extinction.

"Have you gone over the plan, Mr. Gregory? Is it feasible? What d'you think of it, as a whole," These questions came from Miss Margolin like bricks thrown from a window.

"Oh, yes, I've been over it very carefully several times,"

Mr. Gregory began. "I want to compliment you"—he bowed to Hunter—"on the thoroughness of your work. And I would like to say"—this to Richard Ellerman—"that I am very pleased to be here, sir, at your request. Although this is the first time we've met in a business way, I've long admired the *wonderful* growth of your company. I often recall with pleasure the occasion when I first made your acquaintance, Mr. Ellerman. It was in Detroit, away out toward Grosse Pointe, at the Chalmers plant—in 1909. You were there that day, talking with Hugh Chalmers and Saxon——"

"Yes, yes, yes," Ellerman enunciated vaguely, and nodded his head, without showing any other interest, or taking his eyes from the wall.

". . . and I heard you say something then about the future of the motor car industry that I've treasured ever since."

"Yes," Miss Margolin hurled a brick, "but what about this plan of Mr. Hunter's? Our time is rather limited, Mr. Gregory, or I wouldn't be so insistent." She attempted to soothe the impact of the brick with a thin-lipped mechanical smile.

God! How I'd hate to have you for a daughter, thought Mr. Gregory. Then his mind ran swiftly to his two nice girls in Montclair, and he remembered that business is business, and that he mustn't be offended.

Miss Margolin had a moment of finer perception occasionally, and it occurred to her just then that she had been a little domineering, so she said, "You see, Mr. Gregory, we have our own specialists in every department—our organization is so large, you know. That's why we've never called

you in before. This is a very special case, and another like it will probably not come up in another ten years."

That settles it—was the idea that ran through Gregory's mind.

"In this particular case, we want to get a competent outside opinion," she went on, "because Mr. Hunter is one of us, and is such a dear friend to all on our staff"—she sent Hunter a bloodless smile, and he looked down, abashed—"that it is hard to get an opinion that is not biassed in his favor."

"Well, I've gone into this whole proposition with great care," Mr. Gregory commenced, "and my advice to you is not to do it. . . . I'm sorry, Mr. Hunter," he added. Hunter gave a start, and sat bolt upright, looking perturbed—and eager to speak. Michael Webb emitted a cackle of dry laughter which ended suddenly, as if cut off with a knife.

"Is there anything funny about this, Mr. Webb?" Miss Margolin asked. She looked Michael over coolly, her eyes insolently appraising him.

"Yes, there is," he replied. "That's why I laughed. I hope I didn't break the business rules."

"Well, let us have the joke, then," she urged.

"No," Michael shook his head. "I might spoil everything."

Neither Ellerman nor Hunter paid any attention to this by-play. Ellerman still mused distantly, while Hunter appeared almost ready to leap down Gregory's throat with a question. "Will you please tell me, Mr. Gregory," he asked, in his best table-pounding manner, "what's wrong with my plan?"

"There's nothing wrong with it except the policy it

involves," Gregory answered with smooth courtesy. "Mr. Ellerman will, of course, decide as to what policy he will pursue, but in my opinion it would be very ill-advised to enter into competition with the battery manufacturers now in the field and serving the public."

"I'll bet we could lick 'em all to a frazzle," said the motor car magnate, coming out of his trance.

"I have no doubt you could give them a very hard fight, Mr. Ellerman, but you'd lose money in doing it, and they would lose money. They won't let you take their business away without a struggle, you know."

"They're not serving the public; they're robbing it," Hunter exclaimed.

"Well, I don't believe that," said Mr. Gregory, "and I don't think you can prove it. Their costs are heavy, especially the cost of distribution, but yours would not be appreciably lower. I think it is all running pretty efficiently as it is."

"It's the simplest thing in the world to make a storage battery," Hunter asserted.

"You think so?" Mr. Gregory came back. "Have you ever made one? No? Well, I have. It looks simple, but it isn't. You never know until the plates go through the forming tanks whether they are any good or not, and the spoilage is enormous. The experience of experimenters in this line is disastrous. One automobile manufacturer owns a battery company, and the thing is simply a mess. The stock of the battery company is down to two dollars a share. They make pretty good batteries, but they lose money at it."

This argument went on hotly for half an hour, and finally died down into a moody silence on the part of Hunter and Gregory. Miss Margolin then took up the sheets of Hunter's plan and looked over them one by one. While engaged in this she threw one brickbat of a question after another in the direction of Gregory.

"Maybe Mr. Webb would like to ask Mr. Gregory a few questions," Ellerman suggested. He had come out of his hypnotic stare, and his manner was extremely pleasant. "Mr. Webb may be associated with us before long"—he explained to Gregory—"and I want him to get in touch with things."

"Yes, I would like to ask two or three questions, if it is permissible," Michael said.

Mr. Gregory said he would be very glad, to the extent of his ability, to answer them, and as many more as he cared to ask.

"You have a number of regular clients, haven't you?" was his first interrogation.

"Oh, yes," Mr. Gregory answered. "On a regular yearly basis. This sort of consultation is rather unusual with me. It's always best to have these arrangements on a contract basis. I charge a moderate retaining . . ."

"I see," Michael interrupted. "Is there a battery manufacturer among your clients?"

"Yes, I have a battery company," he said slowly.

"What is the name of the battery company?" Michael inquired.

"The Trojan Battery Company," he replied. "I have advised them for years."

Miss Margolin looked startled, and Ellerman said hastily, "I think we'd better not worry Mr. Gregory with any more questions. We've tired him out as it is."

"I want to add right here," Mr. Gregory broke in, "that my connection with the Trojan Company is only as an outside adviser, and it hasn't influenced me in the tiniest degree in forming my opinion on your project."

"Oh, I know that, Mr. Gregory," Ellerman said. Miss Margolin chimed in with "Certainly."

"One of the most unfortunate things about being the head of a business," Ellerman said, "is the necessity of having to decide questions. . . . I'm not really the head of the Ellerman Company"—all present received this fiction placidly—"but this particular matter is up to me to decide. . . . I've made up my mind that, God willing, we shall manufacture our own storage batteries. I value your opinion, Mr. Gregory, but I think our best policy lies in the other direction."

"Fine!" said Hunter. Gregory received the announcement calmly. "That's for you to decide, sir," he said.

"I'll tell you my reasons," Ellerman continued. "First, I should say that this question is not a new one with us. We've been thinking about it for a long time; Mr. Hunter has simply brought the matter to a head. . . . We use a quarter of a million batteries a year, and through our dealers we could no doubt sell another quarter of a million. This is a big order. We have the basis there for a battery plant of large size. Now, why shouldn't we produce them ourselves?"

"Well, you buy them now at less than cost. That's the reason," said Mr. Gregory.

"That's true, but that happens to be so because by selling us batteries cheap, the Trojan Company gets a chance to hold up our car-owners. . . . No, that won't do. The tendency of the times runs the other way. We can't sit by any longer and see our public held up, and I'm damned if I'm going to contribute any more to the big dividends of the Trojan Company. Helping them pull their chestnuts out of the fire. They don't lose much on the batteries they sell to us—about a dollar, and they make about ten dollars on the batteries they sell to the public. . . . Oh, no—that's not an even break."

"That's the way to talk," Hunter whispered eagerly in Michael's ear.

"You said it," Michael whispered back. "It's the way to talk all right. He'll get what he's going after."

"Our contract with the Trojan Company expires in October. This is May. Well, we have five months to get our plant ready. Mr. Hunter, I put you in charge of operations. See to it, Miss Margolin. . . . Hunter, I want you to be ready to produce batteries—good ones, too—by October first." He rose suddenly, as if thrown out of his chair by a spring. "Good-bye, Mr. Gregory," he said, extending his hand. "I'm glad to have seen you again."

6

Richard Ellerman seldom wrote a letter or dictated one. Miss Margolin attended to the correspondence. Letters addressed to Ellerman personally were sometimes read by

him—and sometimes they were not. He had been known to carry telegrams unopened in his pocket for a month. When he got through reading a letter or a telegram he invariably threw it in a waste-basket or left it lying in some odd corner. He did not pretend to make an excuse for these unbusiness-like methods—and when Miss Margolin reproached him, on occasions, for having lost important correspondence, he merely looked at her with an insolent stare and made no reply.

He had no sense of order in business and no knack for filing systems. In communicating with employes of the Company he always went over the heads of their immediate superiors. This was habitual, and no longer aroused any comment. . . . It was a part of his direct, straight-line method of doing things.

The Chicago office was full of stories concerning R. E.'s methods. These tales were related by one employe to another with sparkling eyes and animated gestures. His methods were considered Napoleonic. "Gee whiz," said Plunkett of the statistical department to his cronies. "You cudda knocked me down with a feather when I got the letter from R. E. How he ever heard of me I don't know; probably because my name was signed to one of our department reports once."

"Don't you believe old R. E. don't know who's who," said one of the cronies. "He knows everyone of us here, and just what we're doing. You take a great business-builder like Richard Ellerman—and he don't miss a whole helluva lot, lemme tell you."

"Soon as I got the letter," Plunkett continued, "I went to see the head of my department and showed it to him.

I was ordered, according to that letter, by R. E. himself, to go down to Texas and look thoroughly into the possibility of selling more cars down there."

"And what did your department head say?" asked another crony, with a chuckle of mirth.

"Oh, he looked puzzled, and said I better take it to McAllister, head of the sales department. Well I showed it to McAllister, and——"

"Now, listen boys, I'll bet this is rich," said someone in the crowd.

"McAllister—he threw the letter down on his desk, and yelled 'Poppycock! what have you got to do with sales?' I come right back and said to him—I said: 'Mr. McAllister, it looks to me like I'm going to have something to do with sales hereafter.' That's all I said—kinder quiet like. Well, he ranted around about sending a clerk from the statistical department down to Texas to interfere with his salesmen. Then he sorter calmed down, and telephoned to Dobbs Ferry to find out. It seems that Mr. Ellerman had left on a yachting cruise; and that woman there—that Miss Margolin—killed the whole thing. She said she'd never heard of it, and to pay no attention to the letter. Oh, she's a devil—that woman is. . . . Anyway, I wrote out all the circumstances in a personal letter to R. E.—told just why I had been prevented from carrying out his orders, and so on. I sent it to him, but never got any reply."

7

About an hour after the conference with Gregory, Richard Ellerman sat in Miss Margolin's office occupied in the rare

task of writing a letter. Miss Margolin had furnished her best stenographer to take it, but the girl was frightened and nervous, so it was several hours before it was finally free from errors.

This is the letter:—

“Joseph R. Stanfield, president, Chicago. Confidential. Not to go in files—underscore *confidential*.

“Dear Joe: I have a hunch, a real one; one of the old, familiar, blown-in-the-bottle hunches. Guaranteed to produce results or money refunded.

“T. H. Hunter, eighth vice-president, is here with his proposition for us to go into the battery business. Do you know how much time he has put in on this thing, Joe? He has written out on paper everything that ever happened in the storage battery business since Adam. I’ll bet he has not done a stroke of work in his railway traffic department in three months. He says himself that his department runs without attention. Then, what I want to know is why you haven’t put that department under the general manager, where it belongs? There is no sense in having vice-presidents waste their time in running departments that run themselves.

“You want to tighten up out there, Joe. Things are beginning to run pretty much at loose ends. The next time you come here I will show you some figures that Miss Margolin has prepared. They will open your eyes. Waste on every hand.

“Here is my hunch. We are not going into the battery business—unless we have to—but we are going to make a more favorable deal with the Trojan Battery Company.

You do exactly as I tell you to do, and we will put it all over them.

“The Trojan Company sells us their battery for five dollars, as you know, taking a trifling loss of one dollar, just to get a foothold with our customers. I am tired of being their picnic ground, and we are going to fix it up so they will have to pay a reasonable entrance fee.

“The first thing I did was to call in Edward Gregory to consult about it. I knew he would tell the Trojan outfit the whole story. That’s why I had him here. Today he came up here and stalled around. That fellow is thinner than ever, Joe. I haven’t seen him in four or five years, and then he was tall and thin, but now he is a sight. I have lost ten pounds myself since you were here last. Comes from taking exercise. I just want you to put on the gloves once with Lowrey, my new man in the gymnasium. I will buy a ringside ticket any day for that.

“Gregory advised us not to go into the battery business, as I knew he would. Right before him I O’K’d Hunter’s plan, and told him to begin at once.

“Now, Joe, I want every preparation made for going into the battery business. I hold you personally responsible for this. Of course, Hunter does not know what is in my mind, and I don’t want him to know it.

“This idea is confidential between you, me and Miss Margolin. I want all other executives, our salesmen, the public, and especially the Trojan Company, to get the impression that within a year from date we will be turning out a thousand batteries a day, and threatening to tear the whole game wide open.

“I think you had better spend forty or fifty thousand

dollars in doing this. Get Sweeney & Russell to draw up plans for a plant, get estimates on the necessary machinery, but don't hire any people you can't drop when the show is over.

"The Trojan Company will soon be at your door. They will have the news by tomorrow. Baldwin will come himself; he will not trust this important matter to anyone else. When he starts his talk about renewing our contract, and so on, and telling you how much he loses on our business, cut him right off short, and make it plain that we are tired of being suckers.

"If he reduces the price of our batteries to us from five to three dollars a battery we will stop work on our plant, and renew a contract with him for five years. When you tell him this he will have hysterics in your office. He will prove that it will ruin his concern. Pay no attention to that. Throw the harpoon into him good and plenty. His batteries are not much good anyhow.

"When he gets back home he will think it over, and call a meeting of his executive committee. They will suggest a compromise—say, a price of about four dollars a battery. Stick to your three dollars. On the two hundred and fifty thousand batteries we buy every year, that means a saving for us of not less than five hundred thousand dollars a year—and that without any investment, plant, or labor troubles. It is quite a big item, you see.

"And as for the Trojan Company losing money—why, there's nothing to it. All they have got to do is to raise their price to the public ten per cent, and get it all back—and more. Don't suggest this to Baldwin. Let him think that out for himself.

“They will agree to it. They have got to. If they don’t we will go right on with our plans, and before the thing is settled they will know what life in wartime really is.

“Tell Baldwin that if he will agree to our terms, with a contract for five years at three dollars a battery, we will print in every advertisement of our car that we use Trojan Batteries, and that we have found them to be the best by actual tests. This will give Baldwin a little something to take back home with him, so he will not appear empty handed before his Board. You see, he can charge that extra two dollars to advertising expense, and get it by his Board that way.

“As soon as the new contract is signed, stop work on the battery plant. Give no explanation to anybody. Just stop.

“As to Hunter, you will have to decide about him. He is temperamental, and I have heard from various parties that he doesn’t make a good impression on business men. He is certainly long-winded, and a superior, puritanical sort of fluff. I think he lacks business ability, and I don’t think he should be a vice-president. His plan showed a lot of hard work, but there is not a thing new about the idea. We have considered this all before, though it has never been worked out so comprehensively as he did it. Yet he spent all this time fooling around with his plan, and it never occurred to him that the best way to handle it would be to make the Trojan Company come across. That’s why I say he lacks business ability.

“When it is all over, he will be disappointed. I do not blame him, but disappointment is infectious, and nothing ruins an organization quicker than to have a lot of disappointed people in it.

"So there you are. Don't write for any more directions. You have it all here.

"Run over for a few days some time soon, Joe, and we'll play ring around rosy."

Hunter kept his wife and the station car waiting while he told Michael good-bye.

"So it came out all right, after all," he said. "I certainly appreciated your advice, Mr. Webb."

"But did you tie him up in a contract?" Michael asked.

"No, I didn't. Just as I told you—it isn't necessary."

"Oh, dear, dear, dear, dear, dear," Michael murmured, in the manner of Mrs. Pratt when she heard that Mr. "Ellsworth" had taken the letter. Then he reflected that it was useless to do any more. Hunter's mind was not capable of receiving truth divested of bunk. "But remember about the little fox, anyway," Michael said.

"What little fox? Oh, the one that was drowning?"

"Yes—that one. Good-bye."

"Yes, I remember. That was a funny story. Good-bye."

8

It's a pity that Hunter lacked the clairvoyant sense, or he might have saved himself considerable trouble. For with this same clairvoyant sense, peering six months in the future, he could have read these items:

From Motor Engineering (Sept. 16th)

The Ellerman Motor Car Company has ceased construction work on its storage battery plant at Ellerman, Illinois.

It was announced a few months ago that the Company would hereafter produce its own batteries. The Company declines to furnish any information as to why the plan was abandoned. Vice-President Thomas Houghton Hunter, who was to have charge of battery production, has resigned from the Ellerman Company.

From Storage Batteries (Sept. 20th)

The Trojan Battery Company announces that it has renewed its contract with the Ellerman Company for a term of years. This company is the largest user of Trojan Batteries in the world.

(The Trojan Battery Company almost expired of grief at first, but after a short time it arose from disappointment and defeat like a giant refreshed and raised its voice in full-page newspaper space, in a tone of valiant optimism.)

Advertisement of Trojan Battery Company in Daily Newspapers (Oct. 15th)

Again the Trojan Battery scores a triumph! Exhaustive tests made by the Ellerman Motor Car Company, both in the laboratory and under actual road conditions, have proved that the powerful Trojan Battery is without a peer in endurance and performance.

When the price of Trojan Batteries was increased ten per cent at the beginning of last month, owing to an increase in the price of raw materials, it was freely predicted in the trade that the sale of Trojans would fall off. The result has been precisely the reverse.

For the last two months the sale of Trojans has been the largest for any two months in the company's history.

Why?

Because clear-thinking car-owners everywhere know that the Trojan is the better battery—the battery with the kick—the battery with the pep.

Just put your toe on that old starting-button and listen to your Trojan's healthy purr.

A little higher in price than inferior batteries, but a hundred per cent better in quality.

When buying a battery, ask for the best. Treat your car like a human being. Give it a Trojan Battery and make it cheerful.

Trojan Batteries are made with loving care by contented Trojans.

Chapter Twenty-three

Alas! The Poor Author!

I

I SAT in my apartment at the close of a busy day, heavy with thought.

The telephone rang. It was Dobbs Ferry.

"Well, how's the author?" Michael's voice intoned. "How's the book? Do you remember me? I'm your hero—and a pretty good one, I'll tell the world."

"Yes, you are—not," I called back as sarcastically as it is possible to be over a telephone. "I'm glad you called me up. I'm certainly glad. What d'you mean by getting this book all messed up?"

"Messed up?" he came back, and I caught a note of surprise in his voice. "It isn't messed up. We didn't have any plot, and I understood that Nature was to take its course. It has done that, all right."

"Yes, I know. But you've ruined my literary career with your radical diatribes."

"Oh, no," he said. "Don't say that. You said you wanted the book to be liberal in tone. I carried out orders. I think you'll agree that it's not exactly a reactionary treatise. You said liberal, and I took you at your word."

This hair-splitting was very annoying. "You know what

I mean," I shouted back. "I'll never get any stories in the big magazines now. And you know it."

"Now, now, calm yourself." His words drifted over the wire like a friendly pat on the shoulder. "You can get them in well enough. They'll never hear of your book. Just send your stories along to the *Saturday Evening Post*, but be sure to fix 'em up so the college boy marries the girl and gets the factory."

"Well, why don't you de-bunk Richard Ellerman while you are about it?" I demanded.

"De-bunk Richard Ellerman! Why, it would be nothing less than murder. Can't remove his bunk without fatal results. I'm a scientist, but I've got a heart."

"Well, that's all very well for you to talk," I replied, "but I must say I'm not satisfied with the way you've carried on the story."

"You are not, eh?" he said. "Then cheer up. Your troubles with me will soon be over. You can run the book from now on your own way. I've just married Miss Merrifield and am getting out of the story. Good-bye and good luck!"

Before I could reply he had hung up the telephone.

THE END



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